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## Health and Hope

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Abbie Graue

## Health and Hope

An Arabian proverb once said “[h]e who has health has hope; and he who has hope has everything.” Throughout the course of 2020 and 2021, the health of many nations has been put in jeopardy due to the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing the world to quickly unite and hope to overcome this hardship together. Luckily the severity of this health issue was recognized and many resources were quickly distributed, however, the same can not be said for the community of Flint, Michigan when in 2014 they endured the lead poisoned water crisis. Similar to Illinois Wesleyan University’s 2021-2022 annual theme, there are many instances when local Flint physician and activist, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha addresses the topics of Health, Healing, and Humanity, in her true-story recollection of the 2014 Flint water crisis, *What the Eyes Don’t See*.

Dr. Mona Hanna Attisha recalls the poor health of her community several times throughout *What the Eyes Don’t See*, mentioning that previous to the water crisis, many suffered with malnutrition and underlying health issues. Dr. Mona recalls the majority of her young patients to have various developmental and behavioral issues due to the lack of attention paid to them and their education. Mentally many Flint residents struggle with stress due to their poor environment, which only progresses for the worse as more of them drink the lead poisoned water. Over the duration of time when Flint water is switched to a lower quality source, they are unknowingly exposed to lead and therefore irreversible side effects within the bloodstream and brain. Due to this, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha is able to watch the health of her community members tank disproportionately within children, queuing her to fight for change.

Towards the middle of her book, *What the Eyes Don't See*, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha mentions how she starts holding government officials accountable for allowing lead poisoned water to filter throughout the community, with a goal to reverse its effects and start healing the community. Many times the theme of healing is mentioned because while some effects of the lead will be irreversible, Dr. Mona is determined to heal Flint and its residents who have been taken advantage of. She includes several goals for her plans to heal the community, such as fixing the pipes, temporarily delivering bottled water, and providing pre-mixed formula for high-risk newborns. Her plans continue to focus on the betterment of the children, as she claims that in order to help the youth thrive they need guaranteed attention, better quality education, access to counselors and health professionals, and help getting more nutrient-dense meals. By offering mental and financial support to Flint residents, the community pulls together for the healing process and continues with Dr. Mona's new programs.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha presents the concept of humanity in multiple ways throughout *What the Eyes Don't See* by touching on times humanity was present as well as the lack of humanity she witnessed during her activism. She reveals her extreme sadness and disgust regarding the actions, or lack thereof, of the government officials, while they knew the water was poisoned. She mentions that health officials were aware of a fatal disease caused by lead exposure, known as Legionnaires', that had taken the lives of twelve individuals without being addressed. Lack of concern with the well-being of Flint residents due to racial bias of officials is another issue that Dr. Mona addresses. These examples as well as greed for wealth, power, and status, all show the lack of humanity in Flint during this crisis. However, Dr. Mona also recalls a few brief events of humanity she witnessed in response to the knowledge of the crisis, such as

good publicity, nationwide donations for Flint, and people deciding to stay and help reestablish Flint.

The journey of Flint, Michigan's recovery is a lengthy, difficult, and constant process that may never end. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha shows commitment to her community by calling out corrupted government officials, forcing them to show humanity to those who need it most, allowing the community to start the healing process and pour more into their youth than ever before. By addressing topics such as Health, Healing, and Humanity, in her book *What the Eyes Don't See*, Dr. Mona is able to pull back the curtain behind her town's story and share important reminders nationwide that coming together is the only way of dealing head on with modern issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Health in Flint may never be at the highest capacity due to generational deficiencies that lead poisoning causes, however, now that Dr. Mona has committed the community to focusing on health, Flint has something much more important. Flint has hope.