

Celeste Moss: How Hope in Advocacy Can Create Change

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In this series, Pathways spotlights advocates of tuberculosis, the world's leading cause of death from an infectious disease.

Celeste Moss teaches math by day, but by night she's fighting a disease most Americans think no longer exists.

A high school math teacher at a Title I charter school in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Moss spends much of her time outside the classroom as a volunteer with TBFighters, a global community dedicated to ending tuberculosis. Interestingly, TB is a disease that, despite being curable, remains the world's leading infectious disease killer. Tuberculosis claims over a million lives every year.

"I believe that every human being has a right to health," Moss says. "I don't think it should matter where you're born or whether you have money. No one deserves to die from tuberculosis when this is a disease we've known how to cure since the 50s."

Like many TBFighters, Moss's path into advocacy originated from Nerdfighteria, an online community built by YouTube educators Hank and John Green, who created the channels SciShow and Crash Course. Through that community's support of the nonprofit Partners in Health, Moss grew increasingly engaged in global health.

As John Green became interested in tuberculosis specifically, Moss, along with many fellow Nerdfighters, followed him down that rabbit hole. TBFighters emerged from this movement.

What sustains Moss's commitment is the belief that individual actions compound into greater results. Over the past year alone, she has held nine meetings with Congressional staffers, attended TB Hill Day in Washington, DC, gone to protests equipped with QR codes linking passersby to email campaigns, and raised over \$300 to support Partners in Health's work in Lesotho, a country with one of the highest TB burdens in the world.

"I sold a bunch of these bracelets that say 'Bee Against TB,'" Moss said. "I posted it a few different places online, encouraged people to donate ten dollars to Partners in Health, and mailed bracelets all over the US, even to Scotland and Australia. A lot of advocacy opportunities aren't planned way in advance. You just think of something, and you go for it."

The deepest misconception about TB in the United States? That it simply isn't a problem anymore. Awareness is scarce, which can lead to delayed or missed diagnoses. Moss explains that it always surprises people when she tells them the U.S. still has around ten thousand active cases of TB every year.

Her advocacy has taken on new urgency with the dismantling of USAID and cuts across federal health agencies that keep TB initiatives alive. Moss has responded by showing up to Congressional offices and protests, and also by posting on social media.

“I post a lot on my social media in serious ways, but also in silly ways, just to increase awareness about the issue,” she explains. She recalls how her recent April Fool's post joking that “TB's passport has been revoked” prompted a relative to reach out asking to learn more.

“I feel very much like the world is on fire,” Moss said. “But I also believe that cynicism is a cop-out. One way to actively fight that is to be hopeful — actively hopeful... If you can focus on one area and make change there, that matters.”