

Editors' Note

The cycle of evolution that has led us to this golden age of scientific advancement and information has lulled us human beings, as a species, to take for granted our position at the top of the evolutionary pyramid. Over the course of the past year, a microorganism has shaken that belief and provided a rude awakening.

Since it first emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019, COVID-19 has gone on to plague 216 countries claiming over 1.1 million lives to date. The pandemic has become one of the most devastating calamities that humankind has faced in its entire existence. It has shattered early predictions affecting both the young and the old, the healthy and the comorbid. Doctors, scientists, researchers, politicians and decision makers around the world have all been blindsided by the severity of the disease. No one can entirely understand and predict the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic - a train of global events characterized by confusion and chaos as much as by illness and death due to a novel and enigmatic SARS-CoV-2, the origin of which is still not clear.

No drug has demonstrated any therapeutic benefit on the SARS-CoV-2 so far. All medications used in the treatment of COVID-19 starting from the cheapest Hydroxychloroquine to the most expensive Remdesivir have failed to show any demonstrable beneficial effect on this disease. Most disappointing perhaps was news of the fact that the recent WHO Solidarity Trial declared Remdesivir, the costliest antiviral drug, to be least effective in the treatment of COVID-19 despite claims to the contrary by Gilead Pharmaceuticals. This anti-Ebola drug was approved by US FDA in May 2020 to be used in the treatment of COVID-19 and was

expected to reduce the severity of the disease in oxygen dependent patients and shorten hospital stay by 4 to 5 days. Wide use of this costly and least effective drug as demonstrated by the solidarity trial has already put a huge economic burden on poorer countries.

To make matters direr, parts of Europe and the United States are witnessing a third wave that is likely to strain already constrained resources to a breaking point. There is also no clear timeline on when a vaccine is likely to be available for mass immunization despite the many parallel processes ongoing around the world.

With the research findings being ambiguous on the longevity and nature of protection by antibodies against SARS-CoV-2, and based on lower seroprevalence rates from serosurveillance studies, the chances of achieving natural herd immunity at the cost of severe morbidities and mortalities appears farfetched and seemingly an impracticable at present. Experimental approaches by countries such as Sweden in this regard have also been unsuccessful so far.

While many divergent approaches are being considered in the fight against COVID-19, not all are relevant or helpful in equal measure. Proponents of Alternative Medical Systems have made claims about their capability to prevent and cure COVID-19 through traditional medicine. Their argument is also predicated upon the fact that traditional medicine is holistic and does not require scientific methods of testing. Not only are such claims irrational, but in a world plagued by spurious information, they are dangerous to human wellbeing. Therefore, the onus lies on the traditional practitioners to establish their claims scientifically and an integrated

approach can then be adopted to fight against this unprecedented pandemic situation.

Given this dire state of affairs, it appears that the world must resign itself to a new reality where COVID-19 is as preponderant as malaria or the flu. This will certainly hold true until we fail to develop new molecules targeting heparan sulfate and ACE-2, the receptors for SARS-COV-2 and a successful vaccine for mass immunization. And yet, in some corners of the world hope blooms. Strictly adhering to the new lifestyle of social distancing, using a mask and avoiding public gathering have allowed countries like New Zealand and Vietnam to stem the tide of this virus that has become unstoppable in other parts of the world.

When considering what sets human beings apart from other lifeforms on earth, our

intelligence and opposable thumbs are often a familiar refrain. There is however another trait that has helped us grow as a species and weather many existential storms: resilience. Human beings are resilient and highly adaptable to changing realities. This too shall pass and we will win and adapt to survive, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

We are grateful to the authors and reviewers of this issue of AJMHS for their contributions at such a difficult time and urge all our readers to stay safe and keep others safe.

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