

THE CORONA VIRUS OUTBREAK (COVID 19): A PANDEMIC LIKE NO OTHER.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To attempt to show the profound effect of the corona virus outbreak in every sphere of our lives.

Method: Information was obtained from the social media, discussions, news outlets, scientific journals and releases from the World Health Organisation and Centres for Disease Control.

Results: The corona virus outbreak has really affected every sphere of human existence including but not limited to the physical, social, economic, educational, political, recreational and spiritual spheres. Apart from being a pandemic, it has caused major behavioural changes which may persist far into the post covid era and possibly forever. The profound effects on the economy has resulted in collapse of businesses and job losses as well as economic recession.

Conclusion: The covid-19 pandemic may have come to stay and will continue to cause profound changes in our lives. The disease is becoming more of a political than a pathological disorder. Management of the post covid era will be a major challenge for most countries.

Key words: covid-19, corona virus pandemic, economic recession, lockdown

INTRODUCTION

Since the new strain of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was detected in December 2019 in Wuhan city, capital of Hubei province in China,¹ and the declaration that it was a pandemic by January 30, 2020, by the World Health Organisation (WHO) with the prevailing upon by the Public Health Emergency International Committee (PHEIC), the disease has spread to involve practically every country in the World. Since the onset of 2020, Covid 19 has dominated all news outlets occasionally being the only news item in major international news broadcasts. Covid 19 has also been the most talked about issue in contemporary discussions. Covid 19 has been the major determinant of economic policies and political decisions. It has practically taken over the health systems and institutions, relegating other diseases to the background. It has affected every sphere of human existence, both physical, social and spiritual. Never has a single disease elicited so much controversy and significantly affected every sphere of human existence as covid 19 has.

Challenges with being a novel disease

Being a novel disease, the pathogenesis, symptomatology and treatment are just being elucidated. The treatment protocol keeps changing. The origin of the virus is still disputed and the mode of transmission has steadily undergone changes as knowledge of the disease has improved. Now, it is reported to be transmitted as droplets, as airborne aerosols (either as liquid or solid particles suspended in air), by direct and indirect contact or through various types of fomites.^{2,3,4} Person to person spread occurs in the community and healthcare settings, with local transmission reported in many countries.⁵ Mild cases of the Covid 19 disease are associated with fever $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$, respiratory symptoms such as dry cough, nasal congestion; fatigue, headache, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting and loss of smell/taste without evidence of shortness of breath and pneumonia; a past history of travel within 14 days prior to onset of symptoms or close physical contact with a positive case of COVID 19. Moderate and severe disease are found in adolescents or adults with clinical signs of pneumonia and children with non-

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severe pneumonia. Originally, we were made to believe that there was a high risk of transmission from surfaces, but recent reports show that this is not the case. The US Centre for Disease Control has made official the emerging scientific evidence on Coronavirus transmission.⁶ They showed that there is a “very low risk of transmission from surfaces, very low risk from outdoor activities, very high risk from gatherings in enclosed spaces like offices, religious places, cinema halls or theatres. These findings that have been emerging for a while need to be applied by people to manage the situation in the best manner possible. If this information is true, then it is time to reduce panic about surface transmission, and time to not be too eager to go back to office.”

Controversies in management

Originally, the guideline required two negative tests before patients are certified free of covid 19 and discharged. But recently, data from Singapore demonstrated that “viral RNA detected beyond 10 days is no longer infectious, as no viable virus is grown by viral culture”. The RT-PCR test may remain positive in some patients, detecting virus segments, however, these are not viable for transmission to cause disease in others. In deciding on the criteria for discharge of COVID-19 patients, the most important factor is the patient’s clinical status and his/her risk to others.” The new guideline, which was released this month, provides that symptomatic patients would now be discharged at least 10 days after symptom onset and at least three days without symptoms, while asymptomatic patients can be discharged 14 days after the first positive test and would no longer have to wait for a negative test to discharge. Early discharge of asymptomatic patients, based on suggestions that asymptomatic patients do not transmit the virus or are not so infectious, continue to generate debates. The claim that asymptomatic patients transmit the disease was largely the basis for the lockdown, social distancing, wearing of masks and all the other precautionary guidelines instituted against the spread of the virus. If really asymptomatic patients do not transmit the disease, then in the opinion of many, the earlier claim that it does has

wrecked the world's economy, created job loses, killed many sick people and destroyed many businesses. This will support some of the claims of the conspiracy theorists. Even the recommendations for the use of facemasks has undergone so many changes and still remains controversial. Several of the quick diagnostic tests commercially available for the corona virus suffer from low sensitivity and specificity and to add insult on injury, practically every medication that has been demonstrated to have activity against the virus are dogged by controversy. Furthermore, no vaccine has been found to be safe and effective yet to control the virus despite many candidates.

Controversies in the world body

A lot of controversies have arisen due to the role of the WHO in this pandemic. The WHO has been in the eye of the storm in recent times due to some inconsistencies, especially in relation to the use of hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine in the management of covid 19, China’s handling of the corona virus outbreak as well as comments on asymptomatic patients. There are many who believe that the WHO should be brought to book for misleading and misinforming the world. The Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is reported to have threatened to exit the WHO just as the United States President, Donald J. Trump threatened to cut her funding of the WHO, just as Madagascar may also have threatened to quit the world body over their reported cure for the disease, as well as many medical experts. The US president had accused the WHO of not acting on time to make valuable information available early enough. Due to the speed to which new information are emerging and the need to publish them early, due diligence may have been downplayed by some journals. A recent event was the controversy surrounding the publication of the value of chloroquine in the treatment of covid 19.^{7,8} The WHO advice against the use of chloroquine was most probably based on the Lancet paper of May 20 reporting that chloroquine is not better and possibly injurious because of its cardiac effects. The publication has

now been retracted. Interestingly, the value of chloroquine, though not scientifically proven may have gained popularity by comments by the US president, Donald Trump. "President Donald Trump said that he has been taking anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine for over a week to prevent coronavirus infection even though it is not yet a proven treatment". "I happen to be taking it," Trump said during a roundtable event. "A lot of good things have come out. You'd be surprised at how many people are taking it, especially the front-line workers."⁹ These inconsistencies occasionally emerging from the World body may understandably be due to the pressure of the situation at hand. The scientific world is yet to fully understand the nature and course of the novel coronavirus disease, so the world should not lose confidence in the WHO, as COVID-19 is a new disease, and no scientist has had a previous experience.

Effect on health sector

The health sector in various countries were challenged and their inadequacies were exposed. Even countries that were regarded as having excellent health services were exposed by the sheer increase in the number of patients that they had to cater for. Ventilators suddenly became inadequate and personal protective devices including simple things like facemasks and surgical gloves were suddenly in short supply. Hand sanitizers became scarce and the price prohibitive leading to local manufacture of these products as well as the use of reusable cloth facemasks. Developing countries that already had neglected and poor health services needed divine intervention to prevent high mortality. The leaders and politicians in these countries who usually travel out of their countries to seek health care suddenly realised that they have to stay home and receive the available health services in their countries. Interestingly, at the onset in many developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the disease first started with the political elite and the rich in the society. This even led many to initially believe that it was a rich persons disease. It however provided the opportunity to improve the

health infrastructure and upgrade some of the health care services available. There has also been a lot of innovation in the health sector with increase in local manufacture of ventilators. There is also the challenge of increased morbidity and mortality among health workers from exposure to infected persons especially with inadequate personal protective equipment.

Effect on the economy

The economy of practically every country was challenged and adversely affected. The productive sector was shut down, many industries closed with laying off their workers. With the closure of industries in China and other parts of the world, the need for petroleum products drastically reduced resulting in crude oil prices even lower than production prices resulting the downturn in the economy of countries dependent on petroleum products. With restriction in movement, the transportation industry practically collapsed. The aviation sector practically ceased to exist for some time with collapse of some commercial airlines and laying off of workers. Both local and international trade were adversely affected. Indeed practically all forms of industries were affected although not to the same level. Indeed, some industries may actually have prospered this period particularly with the increased use of the internet in communication, use of apps like zoom and related apps in conducting virtual meetings at various levels etc. Also, companies that are involved with home delivery of goods received more patronage because they became the major means of shopping online. The talk now is how to manage the post covid economic recession that is imminent or already started in most countries.

Effect on the news media

The news coverage of the Covid 19 pandemic has been second to none. Daily numbers of new cases, deaths, discharges and total numbers infected, nationally and internationally are published by the various national Centres of Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organisation. A lot of information concerning the severity of the infection, transmission and control

measures are reported daily. These information were carried by both print and electronic media. Apart from serving to educate people, it has also introduced fear among the people.

Effect on the social media

The social media is awash with so much information, some from reputable sources but many others which can actually be classified as fake news. This uncensored dissemination of information only serves to feed the fear among the people. Fake claims of aetiology and cure for the disease are so common along with fake disease statistics. Social media has also served to spread the various conspiracy theories that are prevalent in the society. However, social media has become a veritable tool in dissemination of information and the official websites for authentic information can be accessed via the internet through social media.

Conspiracy theories

So many conspiracy theories about the disease has emerged from all quarters. There are those that have related the pandemic to the end of the world, those who proclaim that the virus is simply a biochemical weapon designed by China to control population or to wipe out the rest of the world or biological research gone wrong. Several religious leaders have doubted the existence of the disease and proclaimed that it is a ploy to stifle religious places of worship and stop the worship of God. In the Information Communication Technology world, there were conspiracy theories spread by reputable persons that the Corona virus outbreak was related to the release of the “dangerous” 5G network for mobile phone communication and fast internet services. They even claimed that it was the radiation from the network that was responsible for the reported illnesses and not any viruses. They also claimed that the lockdown was simply a cover for the installation of the 5G network and this led to lots of protest even in advanced countries with various panels of enquiry set up by various countries. The claims were also investigated by various parliamentary and legislative bodies.

Effect on sporting activities

In sports, it caused the postponement of the Olympic Games from 2020 to 2021, a decision that has never been taken in the 124 years of the existence of the modern Olympic movement. Practically all sporting events in every country was suspended including the events with worldwide viewership such as the major football leagues in Europe such as the English premiership, the Spanish la liga, the German Bundesliga, the Italian serie A, etc; the National Basketball Association (NBA), the World series, etc of the United States of America; the UEFA Champions league, the UEFA EUROPA cup, UEFA nations cup and so much more. Worse still, with the easing of the lockdown, several of these countries cancelled the rest of the tournaments including the Scottish league, the Dutch league etc. Those resuming have to play their matches behind closed doors in empty stadia, a new experience for fans. The consequence of these is that most of the sporting clubs have reported massive losses in revenue. Over a thousand lawn tennis tournaments had to be postponed or cancelled worldwide including grand slam events such as the French Open and Wimbledon with the other grand slam events threatened. All other sporting events have also been affected and athletes have had to train in isolation since competitions have been put on hold. The amount of financial losses to these sporting clubs and events is better imagined. Even some of the sporting centres and stadia have been converted to isolation centres.

Effect on the entertainment industry

The effect on the entertainment industry is profound. Rules relating to physical and social distancing has made it impossible for musical concerts, comedy and variety shows as well as the shooting of movies to be put on hold. Cinemas and nightclubs have been shut down. The academy award ceremony and other award ceremonies have been postponed. Arrests have been made for those who attempted to violate these laws. The consequence is economic loss to

the entertainment industry. People have however had to find other means of entertainment including from the internet and television. Several entertainers have been involved in using their trade to create awareness of the covid-19 pandemic. Some artists have however been able to perform their live concerts online. Their fans were able to join in using their social media handles.

Effect on other social events

Parties, marriage and burial ceremonies have had to be delayed or when they held, they had to be low key ceremonies with small numbers of attendees. Many governments have placed restriction on the maximum number of attendees at such gatherings. Beaches and Parks had to be shut down during the lockdown.

Effect on political activities

The covid-19 outbreak has markedly affected political activities. Due to constitutional provisions that specify the exact dates of election and hand over ceremonies, political activities cannot be postponed indefinitely. Political campaigns, rallies and the election proper have been forced to be modified taking into consideration the social and physical distancing rules and other precautionary measures. Some countries have actually banned mass rallies urging political parties to use the media instead. For smaller associations and societies, electioneering and actual voting processes have had to be done virtually, using the internet or other means. Countries where the covid outbreak had been ignored in conducting elections have suffered dire consequences.

Effect on religion

Religious gatherings have been banned or restricted to small gatherings in order to achieve the required physical and social distancing measures necessary to prevent spread of infection. This has not gone down well with some of the religious leaders and worshipers. It has however given rise to alternative ways of fellowship and worship using the internet and social media apps such as Facebook, zoom,

WhatsApp, telegram etc. The television also remains a valuable means of dissemination of the gospel.

Effect on education

Educational institutions are shut down during the lockdown. This has adversely affected learning and even resulted in postponement of end of term or semester examinations. The way around this for some privileged institutions has been to offer online courses. The challenge with this has been the fact that not every pupil or student has access to the internet. Some have used the television or even radios to offer continuous education to their students with limited success.

Effect on security

Security situation has markedly changed due to the introduction of the lockdown, curfew, job losses and closure of businesses. While major crimes may have been reduced, there has been an upsurge in domestic crimes such as domestic violence, rape and assault.^{10,11,12} It is humorous that some believe that the increase in rape incidence and possibly incest, was due to the closure of brothels. Internet related crimes may also have increased during this period. It is likely that in the post covid era, there may be a population sprout due to increase in pregnancy rates during the lockdown period.

Conclusion

The corona virus outbreak has served as an equalizer, such that the socio-political and economic differences between people was largely eliminated during the lockdown period. What many people believe is that there is a new world order. Many feel the corona virus has come to stay with us and we will have to devise means to start living with it. Even in the post covid era, there will be a new way of doing things. The world will never be the same again. Who would have thought that a time would come when facemasks will replace lipsticks? Who would have thought a time would come when doctors will undergo temperature screening by security men? Who would have thought that the rich with appropriate visa cannot travel? Who would have

thought that people will attend weddings, concerts, burial ceremonies etc online? Who would have thought that local and international conferences, political, management and association meetings will hold virtually? However a recent cheering news from the Pacific nation of New Zealand provides some insight into the post covid era and also serves to show that even before the discovery of a vaccine, the corona virus can be defeated.¹³ What New Zealand has done under the leadership of Jacinda Ardern is a no mean feat by any measure. While the rest of the world struggled to contain the elusive global pandemic, the Southern Pacific Nation showed the whole world that COVID-19 can and must be defeated. With a little dance and glee of excitement and victory, New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern celebrated the great achievement of the country. "We're very confident that we have completely eliminated transmission of the virus in New Zealand for now." The Prime Minister said, reiterating that the country no longer need any form of restrictions and social distancing. The people of New Zealand are currently in party mood as they received the news with kisses and hugs, as life returns back to normal in the Pacific nation. What this declaration of victory means to the citizens of the South Pacific nation of 5 million people is that they can visit shopping malls, clubs, cafes, stadiums, night clubs as well as various public or private gatherings without fear of the global pandemic coronavirus.

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