

Chapter 4B

The humble contributions of a concerned citizen

I, the composer of this report, wish once again to lay claim to my artistic freedom to make my humble contribution as to how humanity could defeat this uninvited guests causing deaths and untold suffering to humanity. I will in this connection resort to some of the experience I gained learning an apprenticeship in the field of medical sciences. Before I present my input, I want to pass a short comment. There is a saying that no one can claim monopoly on wisdom. So I want to make it known that I am not claiming expertise in the matter. If after reading through my lines you find my ideas silly, nothing for the intelligent mind, you can please discard everything. You may use your artistic freedom to write the most scathing of reviews about it. I am begging though that we allow everything to play out on the level of civility, that we behave politely to each other. After all, the problem at stake is not the making of you and I. Rather it is the fault of these insolent microbes that have taken it upon themselves to interfere in our way of live in such abhorrent, detestable manner. So here we go. I want to consider the matter from the short-, medium- and longterm perspectives.

Short and medium term

It will involve a nine-month period from the beginning of September 2020 until the end of May 2021.

Before I go into the details of my proposals, I want to pass a short comment. As I indicated above, all the experts agree that the best way out of the present situation is the development of a vaccine, which, even if it does not provide 100% protection, would be able to provide a reasonably good protection to help the body cope with an infection in a manner that would avert the development of severe disease symptoms warranting hospital treatment.

From what I am hearing and reading from the experts, it appears unlikely that such a vaccine will be available in the course of 2020 – which makes it quite likely that a second wave of infection could, in the coming autumn and winter months, visit Europe and several places in the northern hemisphere where the infection rate seems to have receded considerably.

As someone put it, as we hope for the best, we need to prepare for

the worst. So how do we prepare for the immediate future, with the possibility of a second infection wave in mind?

I would want to propose a radical approach to the problem. Before I provide further details on the matter, I want to digress a bit to use an example from medical practice to illustrate my point.

When a doctor is consulted about a medical condition, the learned fellow usually takes the history of the patient and subsequently carries out a clinical examination and performs various tests to develop a therapy and treatment plan. There are several forms of therapy. It is not the remit of this book to go into details – I will only provide an overview. Therapy could be conservative, which involves resorting to nonsurgical means such as medication, injections, physiotherapy, etc., as well as surgery. Surgery for its part can be simple – which is usually restricted to the affected organ, or radical, which could be extended to other neighbouring organs/structures.

There are instances when surgery is carried out not with the aim of curing the patient, but rather in the context of providing palliative relief. For example, when a tumour that is deemed incurable happens to be compressing an important organ leading to the impairment in the function of the affected organ, surgery could be conducted, not with the goal of cure, but of bringing about an improvement in the quality of life of the patient.

Indeed, to help humanity defeat this nasty virus for good, I would adopt a very radical approach, which in my view is the best possible way to overcome the virus and reduce to the barest minimum the risk of the virus keeping on recurring/emerging at intervals – short or long – to cause us problems.

Below then is my plan:

The plan would involve taking responsibility in the management of the pandemic away from politicians and placing it into the hands of an international

task force of highly regarded healthcare professionals working under the auspices of the WHO.

The WHO will play a key role in the plan I am proposing.

Indeed, despite any shortfalls they are accused of – real, exaggerated, imagined etc. – the organisation is the only one I know that has the needed network in place over the globe to handle the matter.

For goodness sake, why should the world sideline the very organisation we created to deal with a pandemic of this type? The politicians who are making a career criticising them are creating the impression they themselves are without fault. He who is without fault please throw

the first stone at the WHO!

The task force would have the last say in every decision directly connected with the management of the pandemic globally. They would be free from any political intervention, gimmicks, adventurism, showmanship, and what have you.

Under the proposed plan, every country would appoint at least one top healthcare expert – chosen for their competency and not out of political considerations, affiliations, loyalty etc. – to serve on the task force.

Though I do not want to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, I would humbly suggest that in the case of the United States, Dr Fauci should head any team of experts chosen to represent that country on the proposed task force.

I listened to an interview he gave on BBC Radio 4 at the beginning of July on how to manage pandemics in general and the current one in particular. After listening to his input, my spontaneous reaction was: “Whoa! These are the kinds of experts, the types of healthcare gurus – individual, who have been dealing with such type of outbreaks for the greater part of their professional life, individuals to whom fighting such infections can be regarded as their ‘daily bread’ – who should be entrusted with responsibility for the management of this awful pandemic.”

The healthcare experts will have the final say in measures needed to fight the pandemic from the medical/healthcare perspective.

If, for example, they decide that based on the prevailing infection figures the whole of the United States or Brazil or Nigeria should be sent to lock down, that is exactly what should happen.

The international taskforce will manage the healthcare aspect, based on the best evidence, and leave the politicians the responsibility of sorting out the economic repercussions of the decision of the healthcare experts, and also explaining to the populace why they have had to take decisions, however harsh, based on the recommendations of the healthcare experts.

Such an arrangement would even work to the advantage of the politicians, since they could rightly shift responsibility to the healthcare experts, who, I dare conjecture, would not be bothered by public pressure since they do not depend on them for their votes – and since they would be working with a clear conscience based on the latest scientific evidence, they would not have cause to worry.

In this regard, I would strongly recommend the complete adoption of the United Nations Development Programme report published on their website, www.undp.org on 23 June 2020 calling for the introduction of a temporary basic income (TBI) to provide “a minimum guaranteed

income above the poverty line, for vulnerable people in 132 developing countries”, to quote directly from the UNDP report. Such income will allow 2.7 billion people who come under that category to stay at home.

I will suggest that the TBI provision is put in place in time to coincide with the start of work of the Global Coronavirus Eradication Taskforce (GCET) on 1 September. The emergency assistance should be paid out for a period of nine months, subject to extension.

I also propose that during the nine-month period no report on the ongoing research into a vaccine and cure for Covid-19 is put into the public domain until such time that it has undergone a peer review of independent experts.

That indeed is what has been the common practice so far. How many types of research into various health conditions – cancer, dementia, Alzheimer etc. – are going on behind the scenes, without public knowledge? Why should the research into Covid-19 be treated differently? Indeed why should the public be informed about any minute insight gained at every stage of the research into vaccine and a cure? Scientist and experts in the area could be kept in the loop, not though the general public.

Indeed, much as I do accept the huge public interest in the development of a vaccine and/or cure for the healthcare problems arising from the incursions of the loathsome, dreadful microbes from Coronaland, in my opinion, the research process should not be different from any other scientific research. In my opinion, it is better to wait till the most decisive stage – the stage where a vaccine or drug has cleared all the research hurdles and is about to be licensed for use, before the enchanting news of a breakthrough in the “fight” against Coronavirus is splashed across the airwaves.

That will prevent a situation where hopes would be raised in the public regarding the imminent arrival of a vaccine or cure, only for it to be dashed in no time.

Though I cannot provide any figures to back my case, I do think such false hopes can also lead some in the general public to disregard preventive measures. Reading from a mass circulation newspaper about a vaccine possibly becoming available in a few months’ time may lead some to think we have got on top of the problem, and lead them to disregard the precautionary measure expected from them to help contain the virus.

My several years’ experience as a family doctor has led me to appreciate how much influence media reports are taken seriously, without a pinch of salt, by a section of the general public. Lay people as they

are in the matters of medical science, some in the general public tend indeed to believe media reports on alleged new insights into the cure of diseases.

I have lost count of the number of times that I have been confronted with the following: “Doc, I read this and that in the newspapers, heard this and that on radio, saw this and that on TV concerning the effective cure to this and that ailment through this and that medication. Can you please prescribe it for me?!”

My proposal may not gain majority support. Still in my view there is no other way we could better beat this nasty Coronavirus but through a concerted action by an international team of experts and scientists.

What is desirable: a radical, concerted effort, which may cause pain and discomfort in the short term, but eventually helps us to subdue the virus or an inconsistent, vacillating, haphazard, roller-coaster approach, which keeps us, as it were, going around in circles all the time – today we ease lockdowns, flood to the beach, travel on holidays only to be sent back to lockdown due to a surge in infections.

Without the invention of an effective vaccine to break the cycle, we might have to brace ourselves for that type of situation for the next several years. We could indeed go around in circles for God knows how long!