

Letter to Editor:

Coronavirus - The ignored warning from history

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International Journal of Human and Health Sciences Vol. 04 No. 04 October '20 Page : 322-322

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31344/ijhhs.v4i4.222>

For the past 8 years, on top of my medical job, I have been teaching “Lessons from the history of Medicine” to Medical students from St Barts University, London. One of the topics that we discuss each year is the Spanish Flu.

I inform the medical student about how 50 Million people died of this influenza in 1918. To many, this is the first time they are hearing about the carnage brought to the world by this virus. However, what I had to say next was even more chilling. I would say that in the century that followed, Medical science has learnt almost no lessons whatsoever. I predicted, accurately unfortunately, that we were overdue another worldwide pandemic and that when it hit us, we would be woefully unprepared. In the end, it was worse than I thought.

The response of the medical, political, economic and religious community to COVID-19 pandemic has been worse than bad - it has been negligent. They ignored the warning from history that was the Spanish Flu, but this was only the start of the disastrous mistakes.

Countries adopted wildly different responses when extreme measures taken early on would have been much more effective. The WHO were woeful in their response dragging their feet on providing guidance, pressure or assistance with daily pointless announcements echoing what even the most junior doctor is already aware of. Religious

leaders who are under the mistaken impression that their knowledge of faith also translates to medical knowledge started pronouncing on issues like keeping mosques and gatherings open. Governments acted too little, too late.

This may seem like I am presenting an overly bleak picture, but this is hardly the case. Countries like South Korea and Singapore have shown the way on how to protect their countries, while others like Italy and the USA have shown the opposite end of the spectrum.

When this crisis is over, and the tens or hundreds of thousands of dead are mourned and the Billions start to come to terms with the worldwide PTSD that we are going through - it will be time for us to take a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror and ensure that this never happens again.

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