

## SCIENCE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Nobody knows the reach of the pandemic that has been triggered by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Very likely we are facing what will be known as one of the worst pests suffered by mankind. The lack of knowledge about the number of infected persons due to the explosive character of the contamination rate and the large number of asymptomatic cases emphasize the need and importance of understanding what is taking place, from the molecular level to the whole of society.

The circulation of false information in the media and social networks has become obvious and does not help. Clear examples of that are the alleged data on virulence seasonality and on the duration of the acquired immunity, two entirely unknown characteristics of this new infectious disease, as well as the baseless opinions about possible treatments.

The key to the road to the solution is science. It is not in heavens nor in politics. The development of vaccines capable of generating effective antibodies, the use of antibodies recovered from healed patients and/or contaminated but asymptomatic people and its administration to patients in need, the utilization of antiviral drugs, immunoglobulins and other medications, all require meticulous previous studies. The latter are the only manner to be able to know their efficacy in the treatment of COVID-19. But politics also play a role that at a given moment can be fundamental: ignorance and power can limit, or on the contrary, expand the reach of the pandemic and the damage that it produces to the population.

At the same time as pseudo-scientific charlatans proclaim the existence of miraculous remedies, important leaders assume incredibly primitive and dangerous postures when they are listened to, or they launch proposals lacking any real base, but which strongly influence the vision that society has about what is taking place and the possible consequences. It has also been demonstrated that in almost the whole world

-not to say the whole world- the existing health systems are insufficient to tackle extreme situations such as the present one and, above all, are incapable of assertively coordinating and effectively coordinating among its components and with those in other countries.

The pandemic leads to a social crisis in producing a larger difference between the needy and the powerful. Although the virus does not recognize amongst them, tests are applied first to the important personalities, ostracizing the poor. Treatment and recovery options become very different. But, on the other hand, there will possibly be positive social changes as well, such as improvements in the health systems and social recognition to those who collaborated in overcoming the situation, as well as an increased international cooperation, brotherhood and community spirit, among others.

The establishment of a global fund has been proposed and there is wide applause for the actions set in place by the World Health Organization (WHO), which should encompass all nations as the only way to eliminate the prefix 'pan'. The resources required for research, always difficult to obtain, tend to flow with more ease, at least in the first world countries. It remains to be seen if something similar occurs in our countries, but up to now what we get is a combination of pride and sadness from knowing about the involvement of Latin American scientists in the fight against viruses such as CoV-2, working in first world laboratories instead of doing it from their countries.

Two lessons from this pandemic: it affects all of us and we need more science. As the story goes that Galileo Galilei answered the court when he was condemned, we cannot but say that our planet keeps rotating, with us on top.

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