

Editorial

Unintended Effects of Coronavirus Disease-2019

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As of this writing: “Globally, as of 4:22 pm CEST, 25 May 2022, there have been 524,339,768 confirmed cases of coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), including 6,281,260 deaths, reported to World Health Organization (WHO). As of 23 May 2022, a total of 11,752,954,673 vaccine doses have been administered”¹.

COVID-19 pandemic emergence announcements began in January 2020. Today, 7-day case count numbers suggest ongoing high actual numbers of cases, but that number as a percentage of a population is much lower than it once was. A once dependable 3% COVID-19 mortality rate has been reduced to a global average of 1.2%. Nearly 50% or more of most nations’ populations are eligible for the vaccine, as approved (in most countries, for those over 17-years of age), and have received a third “booster” dose of the COVID-19 vaccination.

COVID-19 containment and eradication require extensive and broad coordination if it they are ever to be achieved. Since January 2020, many frequently unpleasant yet inextricable companions: scientists, government policymakers, industry, money, and geopolitical actors, have been forced to cooperate in a way unknown in the last 100-years. It is a relief to see that many forces affecting early vaccine development, approval, and fair distribution have been addressed (though not yet resolved) by those same forces. By today, while much remains to be done, much of the population has finally reached a recognizable majority of benefit from these actors’ efforts.

On the path here, much has happened, new lessons have been learned, old lessons re-learned, and some lessons are yet to emerge. Societies and economies across the globe have only adapted, or are in one form of crisis or another, and some have changed forever. Employers in the United States have experienced lack of employees’ desire to return to the “old job I had before the pandemic”. Many office or clerical or information technology workers may no longer be required to be present in person in the office all hours of

the workweek. Hand cleansing devices of all kinds greet us at every open office, retail shop, restaurant, and home. The role of our cell phones as vectors in spreading disease received little attention before COVID-19. Now they are being researched for their under-recognized and possibly unexpected role they could be playing, and not only in healthcare settings. Necessity has proven the mother of invention yet again.

While some changes come with intent, design, and planful execution, many are a response to emergent needs or profit opportunities or environmental conditions or other unanticipated forces or circumstances. COVID-19 has revealed the interconnectedness of our collective existence in many ways and in ways we were not prepared for nor understood two years ago. Perhaps COVID-19 has revealed our connections to one another in ways we did not quite understand two-years-ago.

With a turn to the positive and potentially permanently beneficial changes brought by COVID-19 are innovations in so many areas of life: occupational, social, economic, etc. The innovations since January 2020 in business, the sciences, and healthcare access and delivery are the most intriguing and promising unintended consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Telemedicine became necessary when doctors shut their outpatient office doors, leaving anything but acute cases of (mostly COVID-19) illness out in the cold. This led to cries for reimbursement, further accelerating the evolution of healthcare outside the exam room. This in turn has really excited investment markets for accelerating new ways of delivering previously underestimated mental and medical healthcare service demands. The internet-of-things in the healthcare world now is receiving much attention for its ability to keep well-understood and manageable chronic illnesses out of needed physician office appointment slots and now provides a longitudinal structure for patient outcomes documentation and pattern tracking over time.

1. World Health Organization (WHO). WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/>. Accessed May 19, 2022.

Would any among us have thought something as simple as a pandemic would have so many domino effects? Hopefully, some will cease by this publication, but others...may they teach us things that may seem unrelated or independent are far from that and that perhaps, the health of the planet plays a far larger role in

our vitality and progress than on most days we will admit and that they deserve great care, planning, cooperation, and going forward together, not as isolated groups or institutions or economies or geographies.