

## MAN REVIEW 2021

The last 20 months have been the most tumultuous in our living memory, as a nation and as a people, with SARS-CoV-2 affecting the lives of every citizen of this great nation, Namibia.

Who could've predicted what was to happen across the Globe, across Africa, across Namibia and within our own communities in matter of weeks to months?

It proved to be a year in which any predictions about disease outcomes, governmental decisions and even human behaviour would have seemed incredulous to most of us, just a few short and prosperous years ago. The pandemic also proved to us the overwhelming power of social media, not only to inform, but to fragment, to radicalise and to marginalise families, friends and even church and ethnic communities. Biostatistics also became our daily food, as we struggled to digest pre-printed studies and as we pored over piles of unfinished data, looking for the golden thread that runs through it!

It must be noted that in times of uncertainty and even chaos, many of us found solace and made sense of the storm, by holding onto anecdotes and beliefs that were not empirically based, but nonetheless made sense of the uncertainties that we were daily being faced with, in our medical fraternity and in public health. The cry for immunity or respite and even a cure put undue pressure on anyone linked to healthcare provision, and so the loudest voices heard whether through media or hearsay, were those of the outliers, who seemed to provide some hope, but required empirical evidence to validate or refute their proposed solutions.

I, for one, have never received so varied a response by patients and colleagues alike-the calm rhythm of disease diagnosis, treatment and resolution was disrupted and practiced very differently not only across Namibia, or across regions or towns, but also across suburbs of the same towns. Colleagues scrambled to save the lives of friends that had only yesterday shared a meal, or a golf cart, or a church pew, or a road trip for school holidays. But the resilience of the human spirit, and the tenacity of so many individuals who sacrificed themselves daily, led to us being able to get ahead of this pandemic-each in our own way.

What we've learnt from life since February or March 2020, is manifold.....

- **Be flexible!** Our travel plans will change almost at the drop of a hat, or depending on the protocols implemented by our governing authorities tomorrow morning. The rigidity that many of us so longingly cling to, made us not open to new ideas and unexplored side roads that yielded so many fruitful things in our communities during our crisis.
- **Human interaction is essential for human flourishing!** Staying at home for many fertility patients led to spontaneous pregnancy, and so many of us found the joy our elders experienced from simply working alongside our loved ones in the garden or in the garage. Sitting in the COVID ICU in full PPE and touching the hand of someone fighting for every breath led to a glimmer of hope in their eyes, or an easing of their laboured breathing. Walking in our neighbourhood and meeting the people we've lived next to for so many years, but have never formally chatted to or invited over.
- We can get by with so much less! The constant shortages in supply chains and essential medications led to great improvisation and old methods of actually opening the MIMS to remind us of the different dosages of those unused classes of meds we forgot about years ago! We

actually phoned our local pharmacist, and even studied the SAMJ or BMJ for updates on what our patients were questioning us about daily. We changed our surgical methods and protocols in ways we would've scoffed at just a few months ago.

- **Savour every moment!** Every celebration like a wedding, a baby dedication/baptism, a kiddies birthday party, or a surprise visit across the border must be fully utilised and never delayed or postponed, since it may never happen again! We learnt to host uncomplicated and joyous family get together events where no one cared about the florist or the unmatched dresses or the inclement weather, we just smiled and cried and laughed because we were together at last!
- **Death is part of our lives!** No citizen of Namibia, and especially not one of us in the medical fraternity did not lose colleagues, patients, friends and family over the last 2 years to COVID. We, at the MAN office, lost Rose Bezuidenhout, who had served so passionately over the last decade, and whom we will miss dearly for her smile, her poise, her insight and her gracious work ethic. Many of us sat next to patients whom we've known since childhood, and simply held their hands as we watched them slip into eternity, after using every medication possible to turn the disease process around. The numbers and statistics we followed on overseas news channels had eventually become names.
- **Adversity breeds heroism!** We've been part of so many stories of both groups or individuals donating oxygen concentrators and accommodation and meals to strangers they've never met. So many of our colleagues working in under resourced facilities without PPE, meeting the plight of those who have nowhere else to receive treatment! Our Tokyo Olympics athletes who not only represented us proudly, but also triumphed despite COVID restrictions and undue discriminatory actions showing the World what is possible with limited resources but with unlimited character! The deployment of our UNAM medical school graduates who served in the COVID wards, when all other medical resources were depleted at the height of our infection waves.
- **Fact is not always Truth!** Many of the initial extrapolations by the most learned of our alma maters proved to be initially factual, but not true in the long run. So many of the pre-prints that offered unparalleled hope were subsequently shown to be anecdotal at best. Even the protocols we printed and laminated in early 2021 have changed and will need to be removed from our consulting room walls. The truth about the origin and impact and ultimate treatment of this pandemic may only be known once all the facts have been empirically assessed and qualified. Until then, I see no gain in us aggressively defending facts, information or bias, creating enemies and factions, that may soon be shown as irrelevant or unethical. May we continue to defend the truth, which is so precious and part of our Constitution and the essence of our Faith.

The next few months will determine for most of us, what the next decade will yield. And so may we, as the custodians of human health, not simply allow the world or social media to lead us by the nose, but that we will plough and plant and water the seed we sow into our families and patients and communities, and in doing so, leave a legacy of hope and fruitfulness. Isaac Newton said "we achieve greatness, on the shoulders of those that go before us" and hence we are privileged to lead our communities into the post COVID era! We Implore you to become involved in the Medical Association of Namibia, and allow us to explore every opportunity that is presented to our office, attend every public meeting into which we share a stake, and properly harness every resource that is stewarded by our association.

May you and your family have a peaceful Christmas season and a prosperous 2022.

*Dave Weber*