Lessons from the pandemic

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It has been 4 years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in South America. Most likely, and at least initially, each region or country experienced the pandemic differently. Europe was absolutely taken by surprise, while South America had a little extra time to get ready. Regardless of the general guidelines issued by the World Health Organization, which emerged from this circumstance in disrepute, each country faced the pandemic with specific characteristics.

Regarding the main mitigation measures established, strategies ranged from the strictest and longest lockdowns, as was the case of Argentina, to flexible programs that combined periods of closure and opening, such as Sweden and Israel.

The truth is that, even 4 years later, it is difficult to establish how each strategy worked. We continually compare the number of cases and case fatality rates among different countries to try and reveal who established more (or less) appropriate measures. Recently, The Lancet published a study on global mortality and life expectancy estimates over a 70-year period (1950–2021), which included a sub-analysis of the impact of the pandemic on these indicators. Although interesting, the truth is that none of these indicators allows us to fully measure the absolute impact that government policies had on the population.

This is particularly valid in relation to the health of children and young people who, although they generally suffered mild COVID-19, were early tagged as significant responsible for spreading the disease. Despite the evidence that children were not “super spreaders,” in many locations, schools remained persistently closed, with catastrophic consequences for children.

In addition to the disaster caused in education, the drop in vaccination coverage rates, the increase in mental health problems, the delay in the diagnosis of other diseases, and the disorders in development are indisputable costs that children and young people paid, for how some countries handled the pandemic.

It is true that, as the saying goes, it is easier to be wise after the event, but it must also be recognized that there were clear early warning signs that the risk of overreacting could be worse. As early as 3/17/2020, noted epidemiologist John PA Ioannidis warned about the risks of overreacting in dealing with the pandemic, particularly with so little evidence available, “…locking down the world with potentially tremendous social and financial consequences may be totally irrational. It’s like an elephant being attacked by a house cat. Frustrated and trying to avoid the cat, the elephant accidentally jumps off a cliff and dies.”


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Balancing the common good and individual freedoms is a challenge for all those who assume leadership responsibilities. Most likely, the humanity will have to face similar challenges in the future. May we remember the hard-learned lessons.

Locking down people may protect them from some harm, but persisting with confinement may turn living into just surviving. Let remember the unforgettable lyrics by Eladia Blázquez:

“That lasting and passing by
Give us no right to brag
Because is not the same living than…
Honoring life!”

REFERENCES
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