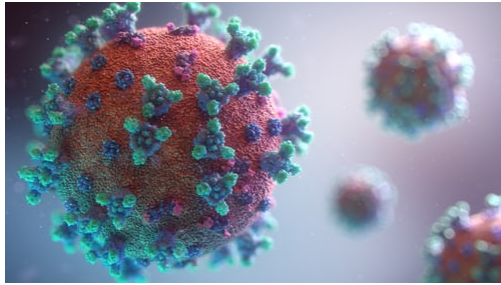


Disrupting the pandemic: Science, Society and Solidarity!

Disruption of the COVID 19 pandemic will only be possible if Science, Society and a spirit of Solidarity moves us to reflect and act. As global citizens and members of our faith communities locally, we have a responsibility to our people. We must actively promote and advocate for solidarity.

Dr.Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram



The possibility of a pandemic, a public health crisis of this scale, has in the past only been described as a theoretical event. Daily updates from the World Health Organization (“WHO”) on the escalating COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the unprecedented speed and scale with which the virus is spreading, disregarding national boundaries, class or ethnicity. The virus has taken the global community by surprise and challenged its assumptions on epidemic preparedness. Heads of nations now have national emergencies to address, even as the medical fraternity continues its matrix reading of people at risk (particularly the elderly), treating infected patients needing intensive care, and designing protocols to deal with individuals who unfortunately have lost their lives.

While the immediate prevention and care response continues to evolve with increasing international evidence, country specific WHO advisories, and on the ground efforts by the health care community, one must step back and see what the crisis means in the short and medium term for communities. I have read many educational articles about the immediate health and broader socio-economic implications and urge each of you to read more from credible sources.

These are also the times of social media and I see people’s response to the epidemic: very visible, frequent and at times reactive rather than considered (and verified). Preoccupation with the unfolding epidemic is a positive sign; peoples’ engagement has increased, accompanied by short-term positive behavior modification and realistic understanding of life circumstances that fuelled the pandemic. I hope this positive interest in health will lead to better investments in people’s health going forward.

Let’s focus, amidst many things, on the impact the pandemic has on society - particularly children – and the opportunity we have to invest in advancing public health. The sudden closure of schools has directly affected lives of millions of children across the world. Families are adjusting to the change and spending more hours together: many updates are seen on this unexpected “time together” dividend of the pandemic. It might be weeks before they return to school, play together and enjoy the company of their friends. Virtual classrooms can never fully replace the dynamic classroom of life that children grow and thrive in.

“Hundreds of millions of children are not in school. Parents and caregivers are working remotely whenever they can. Borders have been closed. Lives have been upended. These are uncharted waters for all of us”. Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, Unicef

My mind also has been dominated by the precipitous effect the pandemic will have on vulnerable children, children whose lives are dictated by the daily wages of their parents. Alongside the economic stimulus packages for business & industry, can we also focus on spreading the social safety net for the most vulnerable amongst us? Never before have the elderly felt so vulnerable (even in the more developed parts of the world). A former UN Diplomat wrote to me that not since World War II has Europe experienced such a crisis impacting everyone's lives.

Social distancing/isolation which was used to describe societal circumstances has suddenly been lifted up and accepted by individuals as a 'public health tool' for disease control. While we put this to effective use, let us also actively build on the spirit of solidarity and think of how and where we can build the safety nets for vulnerable children and elders.

Disruption of the COVID 19 pandemic will only be possible if Science, Society and a spirit of Solidarity moves us to reflect and act. As global citizens and members of our faith communities locally, we have a responsibility to our people. We must actively promote and advocate for solidarity.

Anticipating the need of collaboration and a spirit of solidarity, India's Prime Minister asked for people's time, attention and cooperation in the coming weeks to reverse the course of the pandemic. Social safety nets have to become a priority for all of us. Governments and people have to do it together!

Let's re-imagine 'care' during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith helps to meet the challenges we are currently experiencing; and we must share this with our children, youth and the community. Standing together during these difficult times is a choice we make!!

As my faith tradition teaches me, *'If we learn to live together, there are a million blessings to share!'*