

Navigating Uncertainty...

The enigma that is life means we experience a rollercoaster of emotions with many highs, lows and twists and turns along the way. The current twist that exists in all our lives is the COVID-19 pandemic that we find ourselves in. It is said that through adversity we learn a lot about our own character, and it allows an opportunity for us to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses. COVID-19 has proven to be as big a challenge since the wartime era, but it has also taught us lifelong lessons that this generation can learn from and take forward.

Through the shroud of darkness that encompassed our lives, the countless acts of humanity on display became our beacon of light. The kindness, compassion and selflessness that was shown by so many restored the faith that good still exists in the world. Young and old came out in their masses and played their parts to help protect the vulnerable and to prevent any further loss in life. Heart-warming stories such as Captain Tom's fundraising efforts all the way to the young children helping to make visors for all the frontline healthcare staff, showed the togetherness that existed to combat this deadly virus. These acts of kindness never go amiss and instil that hope that is ever so essential in these difficult times.

Our battle with COVID-19, highlighted the lack of education that exists around the end of life. As each day passed, another life succumbed to this deadly virus. We all faced the reality of how fickle life can be. During this pandemic, many have died a death they may have never wanted as their end of life wishes were never expressed. Whilst we can not avoid death, we can ensure that when someone approaches the end of life, they are given their right to feel comfortable and die in peace. The hectic nature of hospital medicine means that sometimes staff brush aside having these difficult conversations and unfortunately end up being left in situations where decisions are made against what the patient may have wished. This pandemic meant many people died on their own without any of their loved ones around. The need to educate healthcare staff and to ensure these conversations are documented can help provide families the satisfaction that their loved one's final wishes are respected.

The importance of keeping good mental health has been widely publicized and this pandemic has reinforced this message. For many, this period was one where they were distant from their friends, families, and regular support networks. This difficult time gave rise to a loneliness pandemic. During this time, anxiety and depression soared in numbers and it is important that we promote ways in keeping good mental health as part of future public health campaigns. These hidden diseases often prove to be much more difficult to treat because we fail to recognise the signs when someone needs help. This pandemic has allowed us to be more open about talking about our feelings. It has allowed us a chance to reevaluate the importance we give to some things in our life and to try and actively promote mindfulness and to face any obstacle with a positive attitude.

This period has provided us with unrivalled uncertainty. Scientists have come up against a disease that they currently have no answer to. If lessons are to be learnt, then we should look back on history and see how our predecessors dealt with their challenges. Edward Jenner was the saviour for his generation by discovering the smallpox vaccine and eradicating a truly deadly disease. The Spanish Flu pandemic provided us a greater emphasis on public health. Science has always attempted to fill the gaps of knowledge that exist in our world. Whether those gaps are filled is not entirely in our hands, but the spirit, unity, and inner strength we display can ensure we always have a fighting chance against whatever may come our way.

Ameer Khan - Medical student, Liverpool University