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EDITORIAL:

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THAT SHOOK THE WORLD!

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EDITORIAL:**COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THAT SHOOK THE WORLD!****PHILLIP KIGODI**

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Since its outbreak in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus spread quickly across China and then to other parts of the world, leading to the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Three years later, as of April 19, 2023, there have been more than 764 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,908,554 deaths, reported to WHO and as of 15 April 2023, a total of over 13.3 billion vaccine doses have been administered globally [1]. This makes COVID – 19 the most contagious outbreak disease since records started and equally the most closely fought disease to largely contain it within three years. However, there are several issues that ensued during the pandemic which cry out for our comments if we are to be more effective in containing future pandemic outbreaks.

Several factors played a role in the rapid spread of COVID-19. Firstly, the virus is highly contagious being transmitted through respiratory droplets

from infected individuals, even before symptoms appear in them. This made it difficult to control the spread of the virus, particularly in densely populated areas and settings where people gather in large numbers, such as workplaces, public transportation, and social events.

Secondly, the lack of early detection and surveillance systems in many countries meant that the virus was able to spread undetected for some time before measures were put in place to contain it. This allowed the virus to spread globally and become a pandemic before it was recognized as a serious threat.

Thirdly, misinformation and a lack of clear communication about the virus and how it spreads contributed to confusion and complacency among the public, leading to behaviors that increased the risk of transmission. Misinformation spread quickly through social media and other channels, leading to confusion and skepticism about public health measures, vaccines, and other

interventions. As a result, some people continued to go to work or attend social gatherings despite feeling unwell or ignored public health guidance on wearing masks or practicing physical distancing. Finally, underlying social and economic factors, such as poverty, inequality, and inadequate healthcare systems, contributed to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities and countries. These factors made it more difficult to implement effective public health measures and exacerbated the consequences of the pandemic, including illness, death, and economic disruption [2 – 4].

There have been many controversies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. First and foremost, of the controversies, included the ineffectiveness of public health measures such as mask mandates and social distancing due to difficulty of enforcing them. Some individuals and groups even pushed back against public health guidelines thus leading to further debates and conflicts. What is more the safety and efficacy of vaccines when they became available, were also doubted there by putting at risk more people. The pandemic has also highlighted existing disparities in access to healthcare and economic resources where marginalized communities were disproportionately affected. Debates about the origins of the virus have been polarized by politicization of otherwise scientific inquiry.

When vaccines became available, the vaccination efforts have varied across different countries and regions, with the richer countries having vaccinated a higher proportion of their populations while developing countries lagged behind. The Delta variant of the virus caused significant surges of cases in many countries, leading to additional waves of infections and deaths [5].

The COVID-19 pandemic though, has taught us several important lessons, including global cooperation, public health measures, science, and research as well as the importance of pandemic preparedness and addressing social determinants of health. Future preparedness efforts should focus on strengthening global health security, accelerating research and development, improving supply chain resilience as well as investing in public health infrastructure and promoting health equity [6, 7].

Future preparedness efforts should include additionally focus on investing in public health infrastructure, strengthening global health security, accelerating research and development, improving supply chain resilience, and promoting health equity. Other important measures include increasing the capacity for early detection and rapid response to emerging infectious diseases, developing, and maintaining a robust and flexible healthcare workforce, and improving communication and coordination between

different stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, and the private sector. These efforts require sustained funding and political commitment, and should be guided by principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity [6, 7].

The role of misinformation and communication in the COVID-19 pandemic has been a topic of extensive research and discussion. Misinformation can spread quickly through social media and other channels, leading to confusion and skepticism about public health measures, vaccines, and other interventions.

A few published studies highlight the impact of misinformation. A study published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research found that social media was a significant source of COVID-19-related misinformation, with false information and conspiracy theories spreading quickly and widely on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook [8]. Another study, published in The Lancet Digital Health, found that individuals who were exposed to COVID-19-related misinformation were more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as not wearing a mask or attending large gatherings [9]. Clear and accurate communication is critical in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and promoting public health measures. WHO has emphasized the importance of transparent and timely communication in its COVID-19 communication

strategy, which includes providing accurate information to the public, engaging with communities and stakeholders, and addressing misinformation and rumors [10].

Globally, the trend of the pandemic is decreasing. Thus over 2.8 million new cases and almost 18 000 deaths were reported in 28 days (20 March to 16 April 2023), showing a decrease of 27% and 32%, respectively, compared to the previous 28 days [11].

The pandemic is ongoing, and the situation continues to evolve, with new variants of the virus emerging and countries facing different levels of transmission and response. Some countries have made significant progress in controlling the spread of the virus through vaccination campaigns, public health measures, and other interventions, while others continue to face challenges in managing outbreaks and preventing the spread of the virus. The WHO and other global health organizations continue to emphasize the importance of a coordinated global response to the pandemic, including equitable access to vaccines and other medical resources, strengthening health systems, and addressing the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

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