

Search for honest appraisal with trust

Jeffrey Levett, International Gusi Peace Prize Laureate

Director of Healthcare Studies ECPD University for Peace est. by the UN

I have seen flowers come in stony places, And kind things done by men with ugly faces, And the gold cup won by the worst horse at the races, So I trust too.

I can calculate the motion of heavenly bodies, but not the madness of people said by Newton.

While working with what we have in information and knowledge or with the best of and up-to-date evidence available, we need to know the origin of the coronavirus and society needs to come to terms with the multiple aspects of the pandemic's passing. In its still reverberating aftermath ASPHER has a crucial role to play. There are three theories for COVID's birth: natural transmission from animals to humans, entirely laboratory produced and somehow released or natural occurring but genetically modified by accident or design. While viruses have been shown to jump from animals to humans this pathway has not beyond a shadow of doubt been demonstrated for SARS-CoV-2 and viruses are being experimented on within the laboratory and all around the world. The only thing I'm willing to accept is that COVID is not a result of carnal sin. To cover both ends of the problem needs spectrum, we need to design two strategies one to examine nature's pathways that potentially lead to pandemics (preventive public health) in the future, the other to shield genetic manipulating laboratories better, today. A killer who has escaped from what was once known as an asylum creates a dangerous local situation. My two fail-safe cards are that man throughout his sojourn on earth seems overall to have had an uneasy but viable truce with microbes, bacteria and viruses but during animal domestication, he can transport them by travel while their related diseases can spread faster with increased contact and congestion as with urbanization. We should also acknowledge that the tragedy of the pandemic has already shed light on how to prevent future outbreaks and pandemics. A public health crisis can have its vulnerability increased by authoritarian figures who belittle threats, reject scientific data and support improvised solutions or charlatan prescriptions.

The pandemic is real but there is little consensus as to what actions ought to be taken while frustration grows with inaction. Lockdown measures do help to reduce deaths. Autocrats erode good governance and public well-being and expertise is ignored. At the same time lawyers and physicians in Germany have initiated legal proceedings against the CDC, WHO & the Davos Group for crimes against humanity. They argue that vaccination for COVID among other things fails to provide immunity to the virus or to protect its recipients from getting the virus. The illegal action of the German government to lock down, is based on imposed social-distancing and mask-wearing and was taken it is claimed on the basis of a single opinion. Meanwhile in Canada legal proceedings are ongoing and those cited in the brief are Pope Francis, Queen Elizabeth II, Bill and Melinda Gates and the Prime Minister Trudeau. Recently a related request was made to the International Criminal Court (ICC) asking that allegations of genocide, crimes against humanity and breaches of the Nuremberg Code, by the UK Government and its advisors, be accepted by the ICC and investigated. Two points; Germany has not yet fulfilled its obligations to Greece regarding its WWII war crimes against civilians during its occupation while the important legal instrument of Nuremberg did not prevent escape or disappearance of war

criminals through well-developed nets nor did it significantly impact fascism. Furthermore Ottoman Turk atrocities of Pontiac Greeks more than a century ago have been pushed aside.

I recall two exciting and dramatic moments within ASPHER; the first was a three year long moment while attempting to develop a Mediterranean Network for public health. Jacques Bury was Secretary General and Athens and Tunisia were major players. The cherries on the cake were visits to the Tunis Pasteur Institute with Koussay Dellagi, and the Merrieux Foundation in Lyon. The Institute's mission was public health development, vaccine and sera production and training and where the typhus virus was discovered and a Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine went to its then director Charles Nicolle. The second ran a functioning biosafety level 4 laboratory. Charles Mérieux received the coveted Štampar Medal posthumously, when Pascal Chevit, Rennes gave an appraisal of his life and work. The second moment recalled is the genome project put together by Helmut Brandt. It seems even more important today. Rosa Adany was a key genomist player.

Because natural zoonotic events are inevitable, we must establish much better global surveillance and warning systems, and of course early response systems when outbreaks occur. We need credible communication channels to prevent rapid global transmission of newly emergent strains and we must create institutional mechanisms that enable the speediest search for potential treatments, diagnostic tests, vaccines, and other tools and best practices to contain an outbreak. In short, we must be better prepared to share relevant scientific and technological know-how in a more honest, transparent, and credible manner than much of what we have seen during the current pandemic. This whole field is an open arena for ASPHER. In response to a question asked by Robert Otok what should be our highest purpose in public health today and which I presume means ASPHER. It would be to fully participate in all societal processes and functions. ASPHER should give citizens a value based and altruistic approach to education and a positive sense of their personal health so that they can make the most of their physical, mental and emotional competences throughout the lifespan. It should promote engagement in lifelong learning and continually imbue a sense of life's worth and its need for fulfillment according to the principles of Socrates and global citizenship. Health transcends frontiers and cultures, which is a powerful message. Two poles would be prevention of disease and incapacity and a focus on health promotion. Not only should public health add years to life but it must add philosophy to living and ensure that primary health care is reinforced according to the needs of each community. Only in this way can health be achieved by the people for the people. Note that the symbols for persuasion, public health and Europe are all feminine; Peitho, Hygiene and Europa. If ASPHER manages these issues well, its training programs at all levels will be brilliant.

Upfront in my mind are two positive sentiments and strong messages, one by Chinese visitors to Italy during COVID and reported by EUPHA: we are waves from the same sea, leaves from the same tree, flowers from the same garden and the other a succinct balanced appraisal by James Naismith, of the Great Barrington Declaration and the phrase humility and willingness to consider alternatives are hallmarks of good science. In my mind I hear also the long past words

of ASPHER's third Secretary General, Frada Eskin who in her despair with the organization saw behaviors not adhering to and out of sync with the values of public health. Her battle cry was commitment, competence, compassion. Think also of the earlier three D's of denuclearization, decolonization and development of the UN. Frada's management training seminars at White Hart, Harrogate were elegantly creative and intensely interactive. Her work stimulated ASPHER's training efforts with the three Hanks, one being Liefeld who was trained in psychiatry. The other two Hanks were erudite and philosophical. Our discussions then on systems with unannounced goals, powerful agents within them with a different and sometimes a rogue agenda and garbage can models, impenetrable, which seems even more important today. There are a lot of agents inside the system with well-resourced autocrats, oligarchs and bureaucracies to make things happen. The work of the three Hanks was extremely beneficial to my efforts in Greece in the developments of management of health services and biomedical technology as well as interdisciplinary public health or multidisciplinary training. It was 1984.. It was 1984. I was privileged to work with them again in ESST.

Uncertainty and mindlessness characterize a portion of our current moment in history. While there are limited prospects for a better life for many and little space for the international community to work to lessen future hostility something can always happen to pull us back from gloom. Hannah arrived at Covenant House, New York weighed down by unimaginable trauma. She lived with parents who misused drugs and they floundered in a sea of uncertainty. Once she escaped into homelessness, life became even more risky. Fortunately, she found a support system, what she called her own cheering squad and which shows enormous gratitude. Hannah now has a degree in Psychology, plans to pursue a doctorate and now, has never imagined dreams for the future. She might have been resentful and developed a destructive passion but the positive passion of her Covenant mentors prevailed. The Selling of Olga is another of the myriad and painful to read stories of human suffering. Louisa Waugh lets Olga tell her own story in all its angry and heartbreaking detail. This, in the Balkans of ethnic cleansing and a result of war and poverty. Louisa visited Moldova, Serbia, Albania and other Balkan states to learn about trafficking of victims, how trafficking works, how this immoral commerce operates and thrives while analyzing the response to this humanitarian crisis. She helps us understand this type of crime hasn't disappeared and why, in spite of everything, there is still hope for change.

ASPHER's prestigious award in public health implicit in the Andrija Stampar medal reinvigorated ASPHER. Vociferous always, Štampar fought quackery, condemned governments for being in the hands of gangsters and kidnappers and likened Balkan banditry to disease as he saw malaria killing of the population annually while fertile land was transformed into cemeteries. He promoted unity at home and universal social justice. An award in his name brought renewal to the Association. Its long list of outstanding Stampar Laureates found on its elegant web-page is witness to its significance.

Luka Kovacic provided elements of Štamparologija (note the Greek) or the phrases that grew up around Stampar while Ulrich Laaser cut the first medals that were given to Léo Kaprio, Halfdan J Mahler and Donald Acheson. Of interest Mahler said that in the race towards HFA by 2000,

the European Region has a head start in the work of Kaprio. It was Kaprio you will recall that in 1966 saw a bright future for ASPHER.

Looking back I have a regret and one disappointment. Since the latter is said to be good for youth I will start there by saying that ASPHER never followed through on an award in the name of Eleftherios Venizelos whose name is attached to the development of two public health institutions. My regret is that the late Joe Asvall, whose life was the WHO never received the Stampar medal, his life, his world, his passion; a true leader in European health policy and public health and to whom we owe so much. This according to Zsuzsanna Jakab, Stampar Laureate.

ASPHER like Stampar should worry that the work of public health is considered largely unnecessary to decision makers and as he said especially to those afraid of losing crumbs from their opulent tables. ASPHER today needs a creative reset in terms of public health after COVID and my one suggestion would be let Stampar be our guide and ASPHER's programme ASSET be a work horse with adequate hay provided from the European Union, water from WHO and pasture sufficient for ASPHER's experts to graze. In the face of complex challenges ASPHER must bridge that-which-is and that-which-ought-to-be.

- Andrija Stampar Summer Educational & Tutoring school (ASSETS).
- Public health genomics