

The Scalpel and the Sword

Quarantine Versus the Virus, Part II©

By Donald W. Hudspeth

In March I wrote the article “The Scalpel and the Sword, Social Utility and Rational Decision Theory Applied to the Corona Virus.” In that article I characterized *universal, across the board national* quarantine and shutdown as an untailed and unmeasured response which caused premature and unnecessary economic collapse and catastrophe in some areas of the country, not to mention the social after effects. In a nutshell, I asked the question “If we close New York, do we need to close Tulsa?” These cities are opposites in terms of social density. New York City residents live in a swarm of people. This is not true in cities like Tulsa or Phoenix. With inherent and natural social distancing Tulsa or Phoenix may not require the same level of economic response as New York City. This short article continues my discussion of the cost-benefits of social isolation as a response to the virus.

When we are talking about the economic shutdown and quarantine for the Covid-19 virus it is important to distinguish between what we are doing and not doing.

Does the virus disappear during the period of economic isolation? This is not likely unless the virus is subject to heat as are other respiratory viruses.¹ If the virus *is* subject to heat, can warmer climates, like Phoenix, begin to open the economy (a tailored response) in April and May?

If the virus is not subject to heat and remains, then what happens at the end of the quarantine? *People catch the virus. Staying at home only postpones the inevitable.* Some immunologists see only one endgame: “mass exposure and mass immunity to reduce the virus to a recurrent nuisance.”²

If the virus remains after the period of intentionally induced economic coma, then what is the purpose of the shutdown and isolation? Physician and UCLA Professor Joseph A Lapido, who has been working to treat the virus, wrote in the USA Today³ that we missed the window of

¹ From BBC:

A study conducted 10 years ago by Kate Templeton, from the Centre for Infectious Diseases at the University of Edinburgh, UK, found that three coronaviruses – all obtained from patients with respiratory tract infections at hospitals and GP surgeries in Edinburgh – showed “**marked winter seasonality**”. These viruses seemed to cause infections mainly between December and April – a similar pattern to that seen with influenza. A fourth coronavirus, which was mainly found in patients with reduced immune systems, was far more sporadic.

² From the article Discussed in the article “Was Dr. Strangelove an Epidemiologist?” Wall Street Journal, received April 4, 2020 from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/was-dr-strangelove-an-epidemiologist-11585952947>.

³ Id.

opportunity to control the virus. If this is so then the only purpose left is to “flatten the curve” to allow the medical profession to “catch up” with facilities, and hopefully treatments, for the disease.

If this is so, do we reopen our homes, schools, restaurants, streets and economy knowing that the virus remains and that what has truly changed is our ability to cope? We can't keep them closed forever. Someday we are going to have to venture outside and do things. It would seem that places with larger groups of people and high density, such as universities, schools, government offices, larger businesses, factories, could afford and should have on-site mini-medical centers to treat cases of the virus on the spot and on site.

Flattening the curve, reducing the outbreak, has been and is an extremely valuable objective and result. But if it only postpones the inevitable, then the question remains: Did the social *means* justify the economic *end*? Did flattening the curve to allow and improve medical treatment justify the immediate and long-term economic, social and domestic effects?

According to Professor Lapido, the shutdowns if prolonged will only make our situation worse. He states that we can add lost employment, poverty and missed schooling to our problems. I would say we lose a lot more than that in terms of domestic distress, domestic violence, divorce, suicides, lack of job opportunity, chronic unemployment and radical restructuring of the economy. Some people will lose a way of life that is gone forever. When the virus is controlled will we then turn our attention to and tabulate incidents of domestic violence, divorce and suicides?

On the bright side, perhaps heat will kill the virus. If so, Phoenix could come out “smelling like a rose” by having reduced and delayed the outbreak until heat killed the virus. (Of course, that would have been our intention all along.) In that case by the time you get to Phoenix we'll be waiting. Phoenix is a great place for business, employment and quality of life.