

STICKY WICKET

Corona IX – sick of it

Mole

Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - www.peterjeffsart.com

Hey there! I'm writing to you today from the lanai of a beautiful Maui beach house, overlooking the Pacific, with a balmy breeze fanning the palm trees. In my mind, of course. I'm still sitting at home, and I won't be going to Maui, Key Largo, Capri, or Fiji in the foreseeable future. Or Suzhou, Singapore, Munich, or London. And not Chicago, Phoenix, Ventura, or Cancun. And definitely not New York, NYC, the City, the Big Apple. All of my meetings are canceled, and none are being planned. Just (please not another one!) virtual meetings. Yesterday, my friend Professor Mandrill, called me on my cell phone (I initially missed his call because I was waiting for him in virtual reality and had my headphones in). We had a nice chat. And then he said something *awful*.

"I'm just so sick of virtual meetings," he said (this was not the awful part; we're all sick of virtual meetings). "There are practically no cases of this virus anymore, we really need to be able to get together. Don't you think we're over-reacting?" He's not the only one who feels this way. I've got plenty of highly educated friends who are fantastic biomedical scientists who feel the same. Maybe you do, too.

If so, try this little thought experiment. Actually, it isn't mine. Recently, Quokka pointed out that the average death rate in countries with extensive testing is ~1.5% of infected cases (actually the range is 1.4–2.4, but he's Australian). That may well be close to the number where you live, which is great, but let's go with Q's 1.5. (Where I live it is 6%, but we don't do enough testing). So, he reasoned, and was careful to point out that this is overly simplistic, if you do the calculation, the number of deaths can give you the likely

number of infections (again, it's more complicated than that, but it's an estimate). Right now, my state (remember, I live in the U.S.) is doing a pretty good job, the documented 18,000 cases is not so far from the 20,000 I get with Quokka's. Other states, not so good.

As I say, the city where I reside is doing a decent job, and we currently (at this time of writing, not your time of reading) have a reported 1400 active cases (probably an underestimate, but not too far off). And if we stay diligent, we'll bring this number way down. If.

We're opening up, leaving our mole holes, and getting back out there. Mostly safely. But I don't think that will last. People are gathering in larger and larger numbers, not only outside where it might be safer (which they do a lot), but also inside. It is inevitable that there will be outbreaks. And unless we are diligent, the outbreaks will break out more. The virus doesn't care who it infects. It isn't evil, it just survives to reproduce. That's the only rule in the 'It's Evolution' game show.

Every year, up to a billion people contract influenza worldwide. In my country, the number is 25 to 50 million. And we have flu vaccines. If we let this Terrible Pandemic, the TP, run wild, we will certainly reach these numbers. And at a 1.5% death rate, well, you do the math.

I don't think we're that stupid. I *hope* we're not that stupid. (But definitely, the leaders of my country are *certainly* that stupid). I know that Mandrill and my other friends are not advocating recklessly advocating an immediate return to how we interacting in the old days, you know, like last year. They're just sick of it all. We all are.

Many years ago, I used to like a show on TV called ‘Hill Street Blues.’ Maybe you remember it (it was pretty good, and actually introduced the multi-episode, multiple-story line concept to television scripting). At the beginning of each show, the police sergeant would always end his morning briefing by saying, “Let’s be careful out there.” It’s how I end our virtual lab meetings now.

It’s nice to see my lab getting back to work. It’s great that our core facilities are coming back online. And we are doing it very, very

carefully. We are screening regularly (real screening, not just symptoms), and we will keep doing that into the foreseeable future. If this is not happening where you are, and if you can get anyone to listen (or know someone who can get someone to listen) push for this. We are all in this together.

As Mandrill says, “We’re sick of it.” But as I say, “Yes, you don’t want to get sick without it, either.” Hang in there a little longer. And let’s be careful out there.