

# Acting selflessly and in our own self interest

The pandemic isn't over for some, until it's over for all



DEIRDRE PIKE  
OPINION

There has been only one string upon which my mother has harped during our daily phone calls since last December.

"Did you get an appointment for your booster yet," became the signal to wrap it up, as I replied by plucking my own one note tune, "I'll look into it tomorrow."

Not wanting to be left out, my partner seemed to ring in the new year with a resolution to join the monotone conversation with a singular string of questioning, "When are you going for your booster?"

I am not an anti-vaxer, having obtained the first two doses to fully qualify me, particularly as a member of the well-over-50 age group, to get in line and booster up. My hesitation came out of another less harped upon line.

While 81 per cent of Canadians aged five and up have received at least two shots of a vaccine, 3.3 billion people around the world have not even had access to the first shot. Booster shots in the Global North are being delivered at a rate six times higher than first vaccines are meted out in the Global South.

How could I possibly line up for a third shot facing those facts?

Altruism, a propensity to put the welfare of others before oneself, is regarded as selfless behaviour. If we engaged in more altruistic ways as it pertains to vaccine distribution, we would be acting both selflessly and in our own self-interest.

Anyone who thinks we can end the pandemic in Canada or North America or Western Europe, and then worry about the rest of the world, has missed out on the meaning of "pan."

The prefix means, "all." The pandemic isn't over for some, until it is over for all.

Sadly, our nationalistic approaches to vaccine distribution have meant a resounding chorus of this narcissistic line from one G8 nation to another, "You do you, and then we'll do them."

This approach has resulted in what Dr. Madhukar Pai calls, an ongoing game of "Whack-a-mole," aiming for one variant at a time without taking the necessary action to end it completely, once and for all.

Dr. Pai is the Canada Research Chair in Epidemiology and Global Health at McGill University in Montreal. He is very clear about what a pandemic is and how to respond.

"If we do not vaccinate the world, the pandemic won't end, more variants will emerge, and the world will continue to lose millions of lives, along with trillions in economic losses."

When he was asked in a year-end interview, how he thought the pandemic would eventually end, Prime Minister Trudeau tied it directly to the number of vaccinations given around the world, adding, "How are we making sure we're ending COVID everywhere, so it can be over anywhere?"

However, these words ring hollow when it comes to Canada's commitment to vaccine sharing. We have only delivered a quarter of the 50 million vaccines we pledged to share with low-income countries. While we have given \$500 million in cash, there is no supply available for purchase because Pfizer and Moderna prefer to sell to countries that can pad their profit margins immediately.

One concrete way Canada could address this inequity is by taking the lead as a G8 nation to support the decentralization of vaccine manufacturing and waive the patents.

There are more than 100 other companies around the world that could make vaccines available if they only had the recipe. Dr. Pai encourages a both/and approach. We have enough resources to take care of ourselves by taking care of others.

I woke up early last Wednesday and made my way to the walk-in clinic at The Centre on Barton and was boosted in less than an hour.

Now I'm ready to get harping on our MPs and prime minister to do the right thing.

As Dr. Pai boldly says, "Can we get our s--- together, work as human-kind, and save ourselves?"

At this point, I'm not so sure. DEIRDRE PIKE IS A FREELANCE COLUMNIST FOR THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR. SHE LIVES IN THE HOPE OF GETTING OURS--- TOGETHER AND SAVING OURSELVES.



A sign as a reminder that danger can arise from various causes. Writing about danger, travel and the pandemic, Thomas Froese puts it this way: "Let's get real. Is anyone safe anywhere?"

## Our life is not meant to be safe



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

So here we are in a shiny new year—Happy New Year, by the way—and what comes to mind but the darn cemetery. It's a fine cemetery, really, historic and beautifully terraced and a refreshing morning walk.

Most mornings I'm there with the dog. There we go through the park, past the rink where children laugh, then past the woods where the dog sniffs dead leaves and then does her, you know. Then it's up the wooden stairs to said cemetery where said dog—you'll recall her name is Grace—loves to run through the tombstones. If there's snow, even better.

You'll laugh, but my bride and I—we're not that old—have already purchased our burial plot. I like to plan, you know? I mean, you might cross some road and get hit by a milk truck. Just saying.

Today's danger is due to, well, lots of things.

Consider dangerous places you should never visit, like, say, Afghanistan, or Yemen (OK, we lived there for a few years), or Syria. In 2021, these three are, in the Global Peace Index, the world's least peaceful nations. Iceland (Iceland?) apparent-

ly is now the world's most peaceful country, with low crime, strong social supports and the classes getting along swimmingly well.

Canada is 10th in this particular ranking. And the United States? It's now the 122nd most peaceful country. Hm.

But let's get real. Is anyone safe anywhere? True, a few tiny specks, ocean islands, report no COVID-19, or herd immunity. Even so, the world's biggest danger remains the human heart. Yes, heart disease, by far, is the biggest people killer.

Then stroke. About one-in-four deaths worldwide are from these, understandable since about half the world's people now reach 70 years.

It's believed, though, that COVID-19, now leads all deaths in several European countries, like France and the UK, and several Latin American countries, like Brazil. In fact, the Americas and Europe, with one-quarter of the world's people, have about 80 per cent of the world's 5.5 million pandemic deaths.

Speaking of dying, but living longer, I still think of myself as 20-something. Apparently this is common as we ripen into old age. I'm actually three decades past 20-something, old enough to torment my three teenagers with 70s music. In either case, by the time you read this, with any good travel fortune, I'll be in sub-Saharan Africa.

If I'm not it's because I've either A) tested positive and never boarded the plane, or, B) boarded the plane only to have it fall from the sky or, C) had something else go wrong, leaving me curled up on some airport floor, wondering how the dog is doing. I'll keep you posted later on my whereabouts, and well-being, and task-at-hand in my former Ugandan university home.

But in terms of danger, the interesting news is also that the pandemic is not the leading cause of death in much of Southeast Asia, or the Western Pacific, where, prior to vaccines, it was masking, strong contact tracing and early isolation of infected peoples (not mass lockdowns) that was a key plan of attack.

Nor is COVID-19 leading deaths across Africa, including my specific Ugandan destination. Granted, developing nations under-report. Also, a younger African populace, exposed to various diseases, may be more resilient.

Still, yeah-yeah, I'll get the raised eyebrow, the big question, like in the old days whenever I'd leave Canada. I'd visit the mall to pick up some shorts, and, sometimes, mention Uganda. "Really?" Then the predictable, "Is it safe?"

"Safe?" I'd respond. "Have you lost your mind?" OK, I'd never say that. Sometimes I'd simply say, "No, it's not safe. But, then again, life isn't meant to be safe."

This is what makes life good. It's what helps us appreciate the days that we're given. I mean, really. Life? Safe? For all its horrible grief, at the least the pandemic has burst that bubble.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM

### LETTERS

#### Ontario should follow Quebec

I think what Quebec has done, Ontario should follow suit. If you don't wish to be vaccinated, there needs to be consequences for that decision, their actions have affected the rest of society. The premier has to do something or our hospitals will soon be COVID-only, and those people may not have anyone to care for them.

We need something done soon, the schools reopen on Monday and then we will have even more COVID-19 cases.

Hopefully the government will do something this time before the train becomes a runaway, and it may even be too late now. Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton

#### Tax break for the healthy

Is the province going to tax the smokers, the alcohol consumers, the junk-food eaters and the obese also? It would only be fair as, collectively, they put a bigger burden on the health-care system than the unvaccinated.

How about a tax break for those who exercise regularly, eat healthy and follow a healthy lifestyle? They are paying for a health-care system which they rarely use. Thomas Schiff, Hamilton

#### Come together for common good

For the past two years, we have been dealing with COVID issues. Our governments and health officials provided leadership and information. Billions have been spent to help Canadians deal with COVID. Even with the best efforts, over 30,000 Canadians lost their lives.

The two truly disturbing issues that have continued are those who refuse to wear masks and get vaccinations. Not only is there a danger of death, but also lingering health issues for those who got COVID.

Even with the latest wave of COVID infections, large numbers of the unvaccinated are quickly getting sick and in many cases filling our hospitals to the point where other health services are cancelled.

The refusal of people to get vaccinated is affecting life in Canada. Health givers are getting sick or stressed out. Our hospitals are overflowing with COVID patients. Some businesses are locked down again. We have a loss of jobs and income.

So the question must be asked why that small minority continues to act selfishly and with no concern for others? As a nation there are times we must come together for the common good despite personal views. We do NOT have the right to pass on the

virus that causes sickness and in some cases death. Those who refuse to follow safety protocols and get the virus, then run to our hospitals and caregivers and demand to be cured!

Roman Caruk, Hamilton

#### Mishandling the pandemic

The most disturbing thing about the Omicron variant for Doug Ford is timing. He had just gotten his re-election campaign in full swing. Another wave of the coronavirus, another example of his government's continuing mishandling of the pandemic and bringing to light his disrespect of nurses limiting their increases to one per cent, but not that of MPPs. (Put that to a referendum)

Will there be another wave of the pandemic? Probably. Will Ontario be prepared? Unlikely, if Ford is still in power and continues his pandemic mishandling. Ian Martin, Hamilton

#### More dollars spent on highways

I wonder if the dollars that Doug Ford has spent on new highways, that destroy wetlands, be used to make schools safe for our children. After all, they are future! Catherine Castellani, Hannon

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