

Editorial

Pandemic Lessons

Lecciones pandémicas

Alejandro Efraín Benítez Herrera^a

At the end of December 2019, overnight, the planet woke up to the news that a “new” virus was rapidly spreading across countries. Infectious contagious diseases, especially of respiratory origin and transmission, such as this pandemic that we have been suffering for about 22 months, should not have been considered in its origins as an isolated or distant event or ignored the impact it would have on the whole world. This pandemic is actually a global problem, some would say a planetary problem, which has not only made clear the irrelevance of the borders between nations, but is also a problem that is changing the face of the world. For this reason, and as it has been mentioned many times, it is reckless and unwise to underestimate a sneeze somewhere in Asia or Europe, or the outbreaks that are currently being reported in Russia and Germany. What happens on the other side of the world, in this sanitary tenor, will have even more repercussions in the Tepehua region or in the deepest part of the Huasteca or in the Mezquital Valley in Mexico. Likewise, I have no doubt that this is the worst pandemic that man has record on. After almost two years we have observed and suffered different types of crises, not only in health, but also of an economic, political and social nature. All of them are serious situations that put security and social peace at risk, hinder the governance of states, which is already complex. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has demonstrated the failures and gaps in all the health systems of the planet, it has caused many of the governmental and economic structures of the countries to falter in less than two years. And to all this, what has this pandemic taught us?: 1) the global fragility of health systems, despite advances in science and technology, 2) the need for strong governing bodies, at a national, international and state levels, with permanent and assertive coordination and communication, 3) the obsolescence and ineffectiveness of public policies in cases of serious crisis, 4) errors in health, when decision-making is based more on politics than on science, 5) the easy breakdown of the lifestyles of postmodern society.

Many months after starting this health problem, the lessons mentioned have been harsh, but they have allowed us to learn from our mistakes and weaknesses, what I have called "Pandemic Lessons", since, without falling into alarmism and pessimism, this problem will be with us for many more months, probably not with the virulence and lethality of the first waves, but it will continue to occupy and deplete all kinds of resources, leaving sequelae and blinding lives.

As part of the first pandemic lessons, which I consider are the most important ones, we have: 1) Sectorial coordination, not only within the state health institutions, but also towards the federal and municipal ones, establish a constant dialogue with the three orders of government and with the other sovereignties. The Ministry of Health of Mexico must be converted not only into a health apparatus, but also into an interlocutor before other public and / or private instances, requiring the development of advocacy, management and advocacy actions for the needs of society, so that the participation of other structures impacts directly and indirectly on the health of the population. 2) We must prepare for the worst, it is another pandemic lesson. In the book "The Art of War", Sun Tzu mentions, "If you want peace, prepare for war." The analogy of this phrase, related to health systems, would be expressed: "if you want health, prepare yourself in prevention, in civics and health literacy", requiring for this, to make the collection of all types of strategic reserves and favor the resilience of the system. In this regard, we should add that, in this sense, Darwinian laws do not apply, because in the presence of this health problem, is not the strongest who will survive, but the one who takes better care of himself/herself. 3) Another lesson that the pandemic leaves us is the imperative to constantly invest in training, science, technology, research and innovation, oriented not only to health personnel, but also to integrate the bulk of society in these areas of knowledge and basic information on health culture and civics. Other considerations that we must contemplate as pandemic lessons are: 4) To establish a clear and direct communication channel with society, therefore, from the health marketing areas, implement a media campaign, aimed at all the socio-cultural and age strata of society, with simple, truthful, entertaining and assertive information. 5) Strengthen the first level of medical care and train field personnel for the integration of intervention and immediate reaction brigades, epidemiological surveillance, case and outbreak studies, as well as promotion, health education and prevention of diseases. 6) In turn, have trained medical and paramedical personnel and / or specialized in the management of infectious-contagious diseases, as well as in emergency and intensive therapy areas. 7) Keep the hospital reconversion plan constantly updated. 8) Have a permanent supply of medicines and consumable materials. 9) Develop a robust epidemiological surveillance system and implement vigorous and effective health interventions. 10) Assume leadership in times of crisis and promote health citizenship and social empathy. But above all ... 11) Recognize our mistakes with transparency and self-criticism.

Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana, Spanish poet, philosopher and novelist, rightly pointed out in his book *The reason in common sense*: "Those who forget their history are condemned to repeat it", so what happened initially in China, as well as the waves that later hit the world, blinding a large number of lives, could be repeated in our country if we ignore this recent history, which if it occurs again

^a Corresponding author: Secretaría de Salud del Estado de Hidalgo. Pachuca, Hidalgo. México. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8974-9170>.

Email: alejandro.benitez@ssh.gob.mx

would condition that the health crisis is perpetuated even more, generating serious consequences at all the levels and spheres of society. The pandemic is controllable with discipline, empathy, science and technology. Or as Paolo Giordano said at the time: with strength, sacrifice and patience. We must all participate and not lower our guard, act like those fabulous and daring storm-chasing planes (In the Health Services of the State of Hidalgo, Mexico, the response teams "Storm Hunters" were created, formed by doctors, epidemiologists, nurses and promoters health, who got into the "eye of family and community outbreaks" in order to establish sanitary fences and medical and epidemiological surveillance), which are introduced into the eye of the hurricane, in order to understand it and thus generate better ways to prevent it and, where appropriate, be prepared for future contingencies. We must prevent new hurricanes from happening.

References

- [1] Lazcano-Ponce E, Alpuche-Aranda C. Alfabetización en salud pública ante la emergencia de la pandemia por Covid-19. *Salud Pública Mex.* 2020; 62(3): 331-40.
- [2] Benitez Herrera AE. Reflexiones sobre la toma de decisiones en salud y la pandemia por la COVID-19 en Hidalgo, México. *Medicina Crítica.* 2021; 34(6): 349- 349.
- [3] Santayana G, Beltran Llavador J. *La vida de la razón o fases del progreso humano.* España: Tecnos. 2005.
- [4] Sun T. *El arte de la guerra.* USA:Aegitas. 2016.