

Our stealth weapons

In our battle against the deadly invisible SARS-CoV2 virus in this pandemic, we, as a nation, have three effective stealth weapons within us to defeat this nemesis: wisdom, love, and compassion for our fellowmen. These three essential personal virtues, when uniformly applied by a truly understanding and united society, can transform the CDC mitigating guidelines (vaccination, hygiene, masking, distancing, avoiding non-essential travels, and self-quarantine at home when infections are still high) into a highly efficacious pre-emptive strategy that could prevent more millions of deaths and end this global catastrophe sooner. Had we invoked this scientific principle as a society, as a nation, we could have saved a million of preventable deaths.

Unfortunately, to some people the exercise of the freedom of choice to do what they want, regardless, “because I have the right to do what I want under the First Amendment,” is more important, even to the point of arrogant disobedience to the COVID-19 guidelines, resulting in more massive transmission of the virus, overwhelmed hospital system, more than a million deaths, and a devastated economy, in the United States, almost 4 million cases and greater than 62,000 deaths in the Philippines.

This selfish, unthinking, irrational, behavior has, without any doubt, significantly contributed to the almost 611 million COVID-19 cases and nearly 6.6 million deaths worldwide, and greater than 96.7 million cases in America, with almost 1.1 million deaths.

I have used masks and done social distancing since the pandemic started (and still do, since daily cases average about 90,000 with around 450 deaths a day), not only because I am a vulnerable senior, but because, as a cardiac surgeon, I am very familiar with the benefits of my masking, to myself, and more so to others around me. Just like in the operating room where the entire surgical staff is disciplined to be ever-conscious of their behavior to maintain sterility, and fully garbed with a cap, mask, gown, and shoe covers to prevent contamination and infections, the aim is mainly to protect the patient, less of the staff. The mask is to minimize “breathing germs” into the patient’s open cavity, chest, or abdomen. While this scenario is standard surgical practice, it is no less wisdom, love, and compassion for

others. Would those who do not believe in masks allow surgeons and nurses NOT to wear mask when operating on them or their loved ones?

Science has proven that masks, while not perfect, significantly minimize infections. As an analogy, bullet-proof vests do not guarantee 100 percent safety, but without question, they save lives. The viruses are like bullets flying all around, triggered by unmasked spreaders, randomly aimed at “to whom this may concern.”

There is no other way to end a pandemic the soonest without sacrificing some of our liberties and being compassionate to others. One person refusing to mask up, or get vaccinated, is enough to spread the virus and cause a pandemic, like Wei Guixian, the female vendor at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China, the very first case of COVID-19 infection, discovered on December 8, 2019, who inadvertently caused the pandemic. Indeed, one infected person is all it takes to initiate a pandemic, as this and past deadly pandemics around the world have shown us.

The centuries-old proven effective evidence-based epidemiology protocol in the management of infectious diseases employs strict isolation, distancing, masking, hygiene, and urgent vaccination to prevent infection, transmission, and deaths, is obviously in conflict with some of our First Amendment rights.

Temporarily giving up the exercise of certain freedoms during this pandemic to save millions of lives is a necessary and noble option. The opposite majority also has the equal right to security, health, and life (not to be infected by those against masking and vaccination) and not to die. So, this is where wisdom, understanding, love, and compassion towards our fellowmen come in.

If we act without fairness and think only of ourselves, invoking every civil liberty in the book, insisting on behaving the way we want regardless of the deadly consequences to people around us, we must at least admit and feel remorseful that we will surely cause countless infections and kill many people, no matter how unintentional. People refusing to acquire the COVID-19 vaccines, to self-isolate when tested positive, to wear a mask, and to do social distancing in public are deliberate choices, intentional, and negligent acts that transform them into viral spreaders and potential killers. More than 50 million Americans are still unvaccinated. Millions of cases of COVID-19 are expected to surge this fall and winter 2022.

So, wouldn't exhaling or coughing the SARS-CoV2 virus of COVID-19 or other deadly viruses into the atmosphere, infecting others and causing their deaths, albeit unintentionally, like when someone inadvertently discharges a gun and kills some people (with dead people in both cases), be legally considered negligent homicide? - Philip S. Chua, MD, FACS, FPCS