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“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that he may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” John 3:21

Editorial

COVID Cover-ups – In Both China and the U.S. Truth and Transparency – The Antidote for Vaccine Hesitancy/Refusal

Consider the most credible explanations regarding the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic to be: 1) The SARS-CoV-2 virus is man/woman-made that is very similar to but not identical to viruses identified in bats, and 2) The SARS-CoV-2 virus originated in the laboratories of the Wuhan Institute of Virology and was accidentally transferred outside this facility. The leaders of the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) reject any responsibility for the pandemic that has occurred, refuse to permit access to records and other information that could clarify continuing questions for which answers could reduce the number of additional deaths, and disingenuously fault other countries for the origin and transmission of the virus. World leaders must hold the leaders of the CCP accountable for the actions and cover-up that have had such devastating consequences which would be less severe if pertinent information had been provided by the leaders of the CCP on a timely basis. However, world leaders have not done that and most likely won't. If the leaders of the CCP had credible responses that contradict the two explanations with which I begin this commentary, or had been transparent at all, they would be actively providing those responses. Instead, they have been engaging in a cover-up of information that is impossible for others to access, unless there are whistleblowers who would also need to seek asylum in another country because of their

danger if they remained in China.

The U.S. cover-up

Almost all Americans were caught off-guard when the SARS-CoV-2 virus suddenly appeared and spread in this country. Although the virulence and certain characteristics of the virus were quickly recognized, there were many questions regarding its origin, transmission, precautions (e.g., masks, social distancing), possible treatments, and preventive measures. There was no evidence, limited science, and isolated lessons from history to guide a response, but there was no lack of opinions, recommendations, and mandates from medical, political, media, and other “experts.” These responses varied widely and were often conflicting or contradictory, with the result that many of the “experts” were more engaged in fighting each other instead of the virus. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 suffering and deaths skyrocketed. None of the “experts” had all the best answers, but all made mistakes for which there was usually no willingness to even acknowledge (“opinions/recommendations change as science advances”). I apologize for my incorrect statement that it would not be possible to develop highly effective vaccines in the relatively short period of time in which it was done.

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Early in the pandemic I was very impressed with the responses of Dr. Anthony Fauci. His experience, knowledge, and credentials position him well to be an authority regarding the pandemic and measures to limit its destruction. His political savvy is remarkable and bipartisan in his service as the medical expert for the administrations of both President Trump and President Biden. Notwithstanding the situations in which he changed his opinions and recommendations (e.g., masks are not necessary to multiple masks are best), he continues to be viewed by many as the most authoritative source of pertinent information.

I no longer consider Dr. Fauci to be credible, largely as a result of what he did not reveal initially, but has now done so to a very limited extent in response to specific questions from several legislators. It now appears that Dr. Fauci and a small number of others were very well aware of the characteristics and dangers of the SARS-CoV-2 virus before it caused the worldwide pandemic and millions of deaths. Indeed, there is now reason to think that Dr. Fauci provided funding from his agency in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to Dr. Peter Daszak, the head of EcoHealth Alliance, and that the funds were then transferred to the Wuhan Institute of Virology to support research of SARS-CoV-2 and related viruses.

It is my understanding that the administration of President Obama banned such research in the U.S. because of its dangers, and I am not aware that the ban has been subsequently lifted. Even if such research is not being secretly conducted in the U.S., the channeling of U.S. funds (our taxes including those of victims of COVID) to support research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology raises questions as to the extent individuals in the U.S. are also culpable with respect to the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. There have been numerous efforts to divert attention and evade important questions regarding these matters. Dr. Fauci's collaborator Dr. Daszak organized the preparation of a statement signed by 27 scientists that was published in *The Lancet* and includes the statement, "We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin." Dr. Daszak was the only American on the World Health Organization (WHO) team of researchers that visited China in early 2021 to investigate the origin of the virus by reviewing the limited information the CCP permitted them to see. One assessment of this team of

researchers is "a laboratory origin of the pandemic was considered to be extremely unlikely." Dr. Fauci has also been strongly dismissive of the idea that the lab in Wuhan was the source of SARS-CoV-2. However, doubt and skepticism regarding this assessment, as well as the entire "investigation," have further increased due to the recent comments by the head of the WHO team.

As additional information has been discovered or leaked, there is all the more reason to believe that SARS-CoV-2 originated and accidentally escaped from the laboratory in Wuhan. Dr. Fauci and Dr. Daszak know much more than what they have revealed and have misled the American public and government. They have engaged in a cover-up of information that, if revealed earlier, would have provided strong warnings of the great dangers of the virus, and probably a significantly lower number of victims.

The stated "justification" of dangerous "gain of function" research that increases the pathogenicity of viruses and other microorganisms is that the knowledge acquired will help society to prepare for and minimize the harm from events such as pandemics. One of the lessons that must be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that casualties resulting from the escape of the virus greatly exceed any value of the research. Such research must be discontinued.

Notwithstanding what I consider to be the valid and important opinion voiced by virologist and former CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield and physician/author Dr. Marc Siegel, "The World Needs to Know What Happened at the Wuhan Lab," (*The Wall Street Journal*; August 16, 2021; p. A17), it will continue to be impossible to obtain information from the CCP about what occurred in the Wuhan laboratory. However, it should be possible to learn what the "experts" in this country know and have covered up. Dr. Fauci, Dr. Daszak, and other collaborators must be held accountable for revealing the truth about the likely origin of the virus, the provision and amount of U.S. funding support of virus research in China and elsewhere, and whether such dangerous research is being conducted in the U.S. More than 600,000 deaths of Americans and the incalculable costs of the pandemic necessitate bipartisan insistence of government officials to require complete transparency regarding the events and information associated with the pandemic. Mistakes in responding to a challenge for which so much remains to be learned can

be expected and excused. However, cover-ups can't be excused. Unlike their counterparts in China, Dr. Fauci, Dr. Daszak, and collaborators will not have to seek asylum elsewhere for being truthful and transparent.

Vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective and safe in the vast majority of individuals. The benefits of their use greatly exceed the risks. I have received two doses of the Moderna vaccine and strongly encourage most adults to also be immunized. However, many have made personal decisions to not be vaccinated for reasons that include underlying health issues, religious beliefs, very limited "evidence," being in a lower-risk group, conflicting and contradictory statements of "experts" and government officials, the fact that the FDA did not fully approve any vaccine until it just approved the Pfizer vaccine on August 23 (they have been available under the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization) and that we have all been subjects in a huge clinical trial (with the unvaccinated being the placebo group), perceived cover-ups of information, and/or outright distrust of those recommending or even mandating immunization. In my opinion, the single most important reason for the extensive vaccine hesitancy/refusal is the lack of trust in government officials and other "experts" and their conflicting statements. Truth and transparency are essential for trust but are often not discernible or revealed in the present chaos.

There are many situations and statements that are responsible for confusion and distrust. One of the most obvious is the contradictory messages of criticizing U.S. citizens who decline to be immunized while also allowing tens of thousands unvaccinated individuals, many of whom test positive for the COVID-19 virus, cross over our southern "border." As another example, weeks ago the CEOs of Pfizer and Moderna noted that booster shots would be needed. If a sales representative of Pfizer or Moderna made such a statement regarding an off-label use of a medication that is fully approved, the FDA would not tolerate it and the company might terminate the employee. Even now as the Biden administration is recommending booster shots, there is little evidence/data to support the need and timing for such.

The consequences of the confusion and distrust are alle-

gations and criticisms that create anger and resentment among citizens who share the same goal of avoiding infection. The director of one government agency refers to the current challenge with the delta variant as a "pandemic of the unvaccinated." Another individual classifies people as "vaccinated or dumb," others mischaracterize those who are hesitant or decline the COVID-19 vaccine as anti-vaxxers opposed to all vaccines, and another declares, "Anti-vaxx bullies immune to reason," which invites the question as who the actual bullies are. These are insulting and unacceptable characterizations. What should be a united battle against the COVID-19 virus has deteriorated into a battle among people with different opinions.

Individuals who choose not to be vaccinated must have the right to make that decision for themselves. Mandated disclosure of COVID-19 immunization status should be viewed as a breach of the intent and provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). If vaccination against COVID-19 is considered an exception, how many more exceptions will be forthcoming?

Government and health officials, employers, and other "experts" have had the opportunity to make decisions, recommendations, and even mandates. There have been some successes but also many mistakes and failures. Now, "the people" (vaccinated and unvaccinated) must have the liberty to make personal decisions for themselves and their children without being criticized, ostracized, or terminated from employment. It is very unlikely that their decisions could be worse than those to date that have been imposed on them by others. Immunization status must not be a condition/restriction for school attendance, employment responsibilities, travel, etc. Whether one wears a mask should also be a personal decision for oneself and for the parents of pre-school and school-age children.

Those who have been vaccinated have made that decision based on the anticipation of a high level of protection against the COVID-19 virus. Those who have not been vaccinated have made that decision based on their assessment of risk and the opportunity to personally choose the events/activities in which they participate.

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Challenging political correctness

Systemic Racism

1. **Racism is wrong!**
2. **There are individuals who are racists, and there are many victims of racism!**
3. **Racist policies, actions, statements, and words are unacceptable and must be challenged!**
4. **God loves everyone and I must also!**
5. **I am not a racist!**

Almost all would agree with the first three statements above. Some would challenge the reference to God in the fourth statement. Some may respond to the fifth statement by saying they must know me personally before they can agree.

I should not even have to state that I am not a racist, and I know that my friends in all races would immediately confirm that I am not. However, because some in our society view people and situations through the lens of racism, I will share an experience. Some years ago a young black couple who were friends of our family was tragically murdered in their home. We knew their family had limited resources and we gave two grave sites in our cemetery plot to their family. The young man and woman are buried next to my father.

6. **Racism is not systemic!**
7. **The United States is not a racist country!**

At the virtual annual meeting of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) in March, Delegates were asked to consider recommended policy statements regarding racism that would establish the official position for the Association. The policy statements were thoughtfully composed and it could be anticipated they would be strongly, and perhaps unanimously, supported. However, the title for the resolutions was "Systemic Racism," that was of concern for me. A dictionary definition of "systemic" is: "Of, relating to, or affecting the entire body." I noted the potential for "systemic" to be misinterpreted that APhA members and APhA itself ("the entire body") could be viewed as racist, and misrepresent the vast majority of our profession. I recommended that the word "Systemic" be deleted from the title. The response was that we were to vote on the specific statements and that an APhA committee or Board would determine the title. The statements were approved by the Delegates and the title that subsequently emerged is "Structural Racism," which I consider better but only marginally so.

8. **Black Lives Matter!**
9. **All Black Lives Matter (including the unborn)!**
10. **All Lives Matter!**

I view the statement, "Black Lives Matter (BLM)," as an important and well-intentioned message to increase awareness of past and present racism many black people have experienced. Some will reject the ninth statement because it also incorporates the issue of abortion, and some will reject the tenth statement because of its greater inclusiveness that diminishes attention to the experience of black people. Some have characterized individuals who voice the ninth and/or tenth statements as racists because they do not voice the eighth statement. However, are not each of these three statements extremely important when viewed separately?

11. **The Black Lives Matter message has been used ('hijacked') to support other agendas!**

The Black Lives Matter message has been used by a small number of agitators (black and white) to attempt to justify demonstrations and actions that result in rioting, violence, injuries/deaths, arson, destruction, vandalism, and theft. Such actions destroy the credibility and respect for the important initial message that Black Lives Matter, and result in anger and resentment of the victims, while the perpetrators usually walk/run away without penalty.

DEI

Racism is NOT acceptable. However, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme with the result that many government agencies, organizations, corporations, and schools have rapidly developed policies to demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and appointed directors of DEI. These actions have been so widespread that it has become impossible to determine whether these initiatives are motivated by 1) a genuine commitment toward these goals, 2) a perceived need to be politically correct, and/or 3) a fear of allegations of racism if they do not take such an action. But many groups/organizations are taking such steps. The intensity of these efforts to state support for DEI has actually resulted in reduced recognition of the importance and responsibility associated with these words and actions.

12. **We must do much better to improve race relations and achieve a civil and respectful society!**

I conclude with a question. Should the abandonment of the citizens of Afghanistan who have been supportive of the U.S. and our troops be viewed as racism?

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