

The Experience Left by COVID-19

To Dr. Daniel Matusevich

I have enjoyed reading the article *“The Years We Lived in Danger: Where Are They? Reflections of a Medical Historian on the COVID-19 Pandemic”* by Dr. Miguel de Asúa¹. I fully agree with his reflections. The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2, was a global tragedy, partly facilitated by globalization, which allowed for the rapid spread of both the virus and information. The images of overwhelmed hospitals, refrigerated trucks carrying bodies in New York, and the death and illness toll will remain a painful memory in our collective consciousness. The pandemic was a trauma that most people experienced –initially with severe consequences, and later, thanks to vaccines, in milder forms.

Lockdowns, uncertainty, and fear left profound consequences, especially for healthcare personnel on the front line. Even today, the effects of COVID-19 persist, with evidence of pathological consequences such as long COVID, post-traumatic syndrome, and multisystem inflammatory syndrome. These effects continue to be the subject of research and study.

From my area of work—health-related biotechnology—I would like to share an experience. As part of the learning process in the courses Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Biotechnology at the Universidad Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires (UHIBA), every year, together with students, we write summaries on the impact of our learning of various pathologies. With the 2022 cohort, we decided to write a book on the experience left by COVID-19, particularly regarding our discipline². The first part focuses on what we have learned about pathology, diagnosis, treatment, and vaccines, addressing trends and insights that could help better respond to future health emergencies.

The second part includes reflections and interviews with scientists, entrepreneurs, and professionals from

various fields who shared their experiences with us during the pandemic. Undoubtedly, it was a time of global cooperation among scientists, businesses, and regulatory agencies to find fast and effective solutions to immediate challenges. In Argentina, research groups collaborated with what was then the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Productive Innovation to rapidly develop supplies, equipment, diagnostic kits, medications, and vaccines, focusing on technology transfer to enable emergency approval, ensuring their quick and safe availability for society. Some projects were completed during the emergency, while others continued to develop, but all contributed significant efforts and, in some cases, technological milestones.

Our research led us to reflect on the lessons learned, the technologies developed, and the crucial role of science, biotechnology, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In the book, we included reflections from researchers, ranging from bioethics to the social impact of their work and the relationship between science and society. During the pandemic, the scientific community acted quickly, sharing knowledge, companies produced essential supplies, and governments funded the development and distribution of vaccines.

We believed we should not miss the opportunity to communicate what this unique experience represented—to learn from the progress made and to acknowledge the silent sacrifices many have made to contribute, each in their own way, to overcoming this challenging time. We also sought to highlight new perspectives, emerging structures, and renewed approaches, particularly Pharmaceutical Biotechnology.

Dr. Asúa mentions in his article that some of us expected or hoped that lockdowns and the pause in human activity would lead to a positive paradigm shift for the planet, but this ultimately did not happen. The

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world remains mired in conflicts, wars, and divisions, and environmental damage remains a constant concern.

However, in some aspects, some progress has been achieved; for example, it was demonstrated that greater collaboration between science and industry for the benefit of society is possible. Although these advancements were neither massive nor perfect, they left significant marks and paved the way for future collaborations. It is up to us to seize the lessons of the pandemic not just as a lesson in survival but as an opportunity to improve our responses to future health crises. The COVID-19 experience, though painful, provided us with valuable insights that we should harness and transform into growth, innovation, and solidarity to build a more prepared and resilient future.

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