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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Living with the COVID-19 pandemic: act now with the tools we have

The Lancet Online | 8 October 2020

Juliet Bedford, Delia Enria, Johan Giesecke, David Heymann and Chikwe Ihekweazu et al

The responses of countries to the COVID-19 pandemic have been disparate. Many countries are reopening workplaces, schools, and social gatherings and striving to adapt their economies and resume international travel. Other countries are attempting to suppress transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by again restricting businesses, industries, and schools while hoping for future COVID-19 vaccines or treatments. The Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Infectious Hazards (STAG-IH), the independent advisory group to the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, has reviewed information from countries around the world and has concluded that the most sound approach on the basis of current understanding is to deploy long-term strategies with a focus on preventing amplification of transmission, protecting those most at risk of severe illness, and supporting research to better understand the virus, the disease, and people's responses to them.

Mental health matters

The Lancet Global Health | 10 October 2020

October 10 marks World Mental Health Day. This year's campaign theme, developed by WHO, United for Global Mental Health, and the World Federation for Mental Health, recognises that investment in mental health has not matched rising global awareness of the scale of the problem in recent years. The campaign slogan—"Move for mental health: Let's invest"—calls the world to action and, for the first time, will be accompanied by a global online advocacy event. From addiction to dementia to schizophrenia, almost 1 billion people worldwide suffer from a mental disorder. Lost productivity as a result of two of the most common mental disorders, anxiety and depression, costs the global economy US\$ 1 trillion each year. In total, poor mental health was estimated to cost the world economy approximately \$2.5 trillion per year in poor health and reduced productivity in 2010, a cost projected to rise to \$6 trillion by 2030. Yet, despite substantial advances in research, demonstrating the clinical and cost-effectiveness of pharmacological and psychosocial interventions to prevent and treat common mental disorders, delivery at scale and translation into real-world benefits has been slow. The costs involved in mental health care are many and

can involve social services, primary, secondary, and tertiary care. In addition to direct intervention costs, expenditure can be expected to cover facilities, staff, administration, management, training, supervision, advocacy and outreach activities. The diversity of services and care providers can complicate estimates of national mental health expenditure.

Elders suffering recurrent injurious falls: causal analysis from a rural tribal community in the eastern part of India

Rural and Remote Health | 21 October 2020

Arista Lahiri, Sweety Suman Jha and Arup Chakraborty

Falls among the elderly are prevalent but preventable. There is a knowledge gap regarding the factors causing recurrent injurious falls among the elderly, especially in tribal areas. The aim of the present study was to find out the incidence of injurious falls among elderly participants and measure the effect of selected predictors on recurrent injurious falls. The mean age of the participants at the baseline was 69.16 (± 2.95) years. The majority were male (55.60%), with sedentary physical activity (49.63%). At baseline, history of injurious fall in the preceding 1 year was present in 37.69% of participants. At baseline, 53.17% had malnutrition and 54.29% were dependent on caregivers for activities of daily living. During the follow-up period there were 153 episodes of injurious falls. The incidence of fall was 29.88 episodes per 100 person-years. History of fall had a hazard ratio of 2.33 (95% confidence interval (CI): 1.01–5.38). The hazard ratios for malnutrition, impaired balance and faster walking speed respectively were 1.20 (95%CI: 1.01–3.60), 5.96 (95%CI: 3.52–6.34) and 3.23 (95%CI: 2.12–5.26), and were statistically significant. Physical status indicators such as nutritional status, balance and walking speed appeared to be key factors contributing to recurrent injurious falls. Proper nutrition, and regular check-up and rehabilitative measures, are needed to reduce recurrent falls.

Building a tuberculosis-free world while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

Michael Reid, Sachin Silva, Nimalan Arinaminpathy and Eric Goosby

The Lancet Online | 24 October 2020

In March, 2019, the *Lancet* Commission on Tuberculosis highlighted the opportunity to build a tuberculosis-free world. After years of neglect of this disease, the UN High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis in September, 2018, made ending tuberculosis a global priority; global leaders committed to important steps, including ambitious country-specific tuberculosis case-finding and prevention targets, and a revitalised research agenda. The *Lancet* Commission concluded that the prospect of a tuberculosis-free world was a realistic objective that could be achieved with sufficient accountability and resources, and detailed the catastrophic consequences of failing to build on that momentum. In India alone, deaths from tuberculosis would cost the economy at least US\$32 billion each year over the next 30 years.

Developing health policies in patients presenting with SARS-CoV-2: consider tuberculosis

The Lancet Global Health | November 2020

Karen Keddy, Giovanni Migliori and Martie Van Der Walth

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has led to a prominent public health response, with many countries introducing highly proactive measures for screening and identifying severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). COVID-19 has gained the dubious honour as the single greatest infectious cause of global mortality in 2020. Active COVID-19 disease encompasses cough, fever, fatigue, and shortness of breath among other signs and symptoms. Risk factors for severe COVID-19 disease include diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, immune suppression, and age. Some select population demographics (people who are Black, Hispanic, or a member of another ethnic minority group), in association with overcrowded housing and homelessness, are also at risk of severe disease and mortality.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

How to create a gender-balanced world for the girl child in our new normal

Health-e News | 12 October 2020

We're living in what many have described as a 'new normal.' Yet, how do we reshape the norm so that the girl child is no longer left behind? Novartis' Sibonile Dube has a few practical suggestions. As we head into the last quarter of 2020, the world looks vastly different to what it did in 2019, something none of us ever envisioned for this year. Since the start of lockdown, we've seen an increase in activism and many people adding their voice to various aspects of our everyday life. This is our chance to accelerate social change and reshape the environment within our sphere of influence. As we observe the International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October, there are small, but highly impactful actions we can and should all take to actively craft the new normal we want to live in, and we envision for the generation of women that will follow. We need to listen more and act more. The rising generation of women in South Africa, across the continent and indeed in the rest of the world is inter-connected and is not waiting to be given a voice; they're taking to all the platforms they have to share, inform and empower. It is our responsibility to listen and be the bridge between them and their aspirations. It takes society, government and the business community to create an enabling environment today, for the success of future generations.

The world could see a COVID-19 vaccine by next year — here's who will get it and how

Bhekisisa | 14 October 2020

Even if a jab is shown to work, there won't be enough doses for everyone. Countries such as South Africa would need to make tough decisions about who it would give the vaccine to — and more importantly how to create a system to get it to them. With hundreds of potential COVID-19 vaccines in development and a handful on the horizon, many companies are optimistic about having a jab ready by the beginning of next year. But testing vaccine candidates as fast and safely as possible, is only the first step. The next part may prove to be the bigger challenge — distributing the vaccine and determining who needs it most. While the United States and Europe have been investing millions of dollars into procuring doses ahead of time, without knowing if that particular shot will work, not all countries can afford such deals. COVAX, an initiative run by the vaccine alliance, GAVI, aims to ensure equitable access to a COVID vaccine when it becomes available. So far, South Africa has submitted a non-binding confirmation of intent to participate...

Medical staff caught changing medicine expiry dates

Health-e News | 15 October 2020

The Office of Health Standards Compliance (OHSC) allegedly discovered Charlotte Maxeke Hospital staff changing medicine expiration dates to conceal expired drugs, but staff at the Johannesburg hospital may not be the only ones, warns the OHSC following recent inspections. Created in 2013, the office inspects clinics and hospitals to ensure that health facilities adhere to health standards. Judged on criteria such as patient safety and leaderships, facilities can be inspected either routinely or in response to complaints. In the office's first three years, it has managed to inspect about 40 percent of the country's health facilities, according to OHSC Acting CEO Bafana Msibi. According to Msibi, poor health facility management continues to reverberate throughout the health system, leading to poor operational planning, as well as poor management of medicines and waste. In 2014/15, the office found that Charlotte Maxeke Hospital staff allegedly manually changing the expiration dates on medicine. In Mpumalanga, expired medicines remained on shelves next to expired medical equipment. "We found facility managers changing the expiry date of the medicine so that their facilities could pass the inspection," Msibi said. The office also uncovered multiple instances around the country where newborn babies shared incubators due to a shortage of equipment. Meanwhile the Northern Cape's De Aar Hospital got slated for cleanliness and at Pretoria's Mamelodi Hospital, patients were found sleeping on the floor. Limpopo and the Eastern Cape received the worst marks from the office while Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal emerged as the best ranked provinces, according to inspections carried out over the last financial year.

Global Handwashing Day: Covid-19 a reminder that handwashing could save lives

Health-e News | 15 October 2020

As the world marks Global Handwashing Day in the midst of a pandemic, experts encourage parents to teach children about the importance of handwashing with soap. This year, Global Handwashing Day holds greater significance as the Covid-19 pandemic sweeps through the world. Global Handwashing Day is marked on 15 October each year to raise awareness about the importance of handwashing with soap.

This year the theme is 'Hand Hygiene for All.' The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of this healthy habit. "It is critically important to clean your hands regularly with water and soap or an alcohol-based hand rub," says the United Nations. Germs from unwashed hands can be transferred to other objects, like handrails, table-tops, and then transferred to another person's hands. "Hand washing is one of the simplest but most effective measure to combat communicable diseases," says Dr Suzan Louw from the Department of Haematology at the University of Witwatersrand. "Bacteria and viruses need to have a vehicle to get from one person to another and hands are that vehicle that transport the micro-organisms into one's body." In communities where there is shortage of running water, Louw encourages families to refrain from using same water to wash their hands. "Where there is a shortage of running water people must put water into smaller containers and wash hands in separate containers," she says.

COVID-19's impact on HIV treatment less severe than feared

UNAIDS | 16 October 2020

While recent data collection has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on HIV testing services, the impact on HIV treatment is less than originally feared. As of August 2020, the UNAIDS, World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund data collection exercise to identify national, regional and global disruptions of routine HIV services caused by COVID-19 had collected treatment data from 85 countries, of which 22 countries reported data over a sufficient number of months to enable the identification of trends. To measure the impact of COVID-19 on HIV treatment services, a ratio was calculated relative to January—for example, if the number of people on treatment in April was the same as in January, the ratio is 1; if there was a decline, the ratio is less than 1.

Drones to carry COVID-19 samples between UK hospitals

PA Science | 19 October 2020

The drones, which can carry up to 2kg, will be piloted by former RAF and Royal Navy fighter pilots. A medical drone delivery service that makes it possible for the machines to carry COVID-19 samples, test kits and personal protective equipment between hospitals has been backed by the UK Space Agency. Apian, which was founded by NHS staff as part of the NHS Clinical Entrepreneur Programme, aims to establish a network of secure air corridors for electric drones to navigate via satellite-enabled GPS. Using the drones to help in the COVID-19 response will avoid courier call-out waiting times, free up NHS staff, reduce unnecessary physical contact and minimise the risk of secondary transmission of the virus. The drones will travel at around 77kph (48mph). The project will be based at Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford, part of Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, and will be supported by the local Anglia Ruskin University as the academic partner.

Community-led campaign encourages people living with HIV to start treatment

UNAIDS | 21 October 2020

A new community-led public information campaign, It is in Your Power to, aimed at encouraging people living with HIV to start antiretroviral therapy has been launched in the four largest areas of the Russian Federation. The campaign's website has 12 "capsules" with inspiring stories told by people living with HIV. By "opening" the capsule, visitors can find out about people's lives, find facts on antiretroviral therapy, ask questions and get help from peer counsellors on HIV-related issues. All the stories deliver a message that being diagnosed with HIV does not define a person and that if people living with HIV start treatment they can live a long and productive life.

TB treatment time cut by a third

Spotlight | 21 October 2020

A new four-month treatment course for drug-sensitive tuberculosis (the most common form of TB by far) is as safe and effective as the current six-month treatment course that has been in use since the 1980s, according to findings from a large new study. Experts say the new findings "mark the biggest shift in TB care in decades".

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Building a new economy: Highlights of the Reconstruction and Recovery Plan

sacoronavirus.co.za | 15 October

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to address long-term structural deficiencies in the South African economy and place the economy on a new path to growth and job creation. In this regard, reconstruction from COVID-19 should be seen not in terms of recovery to what was, but in terms of transformation to what is next. President Ramaphosa captured our determination to reset the South African economy when he said: "We are determined not merely to return our economy to where it was before the coronavirus, but to forge a new economy in a new global reality." While the COVID-19 global pandemic is a crisis of unprecedented scale, it is also a rupture with the past, and an opportunity to drive fundamental and lasting change. Just as the post-war era enabled the restructuring of economies, societies and the global order, COVID-19 will herald a transformation of social and economic relations in South Africa. South Africa's growth story will rely on a massive investment in infrastructure, including in energy, telecommunications, ports and rail. It will be propelled by swift reforms to unleash latent potential, and supported by an efficient state that is committed to clean governance. It will be inclusive, digital, green and sustainable, and it will invest in our human capital to lay the foundations for the future.

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

The South African Health Review (SAHR) 2021 Call for Abstracts closing on 31 October!

Health Systems Trust | Closing date: 31 October 2020

Prospective authors are invited to submit abstracts that examine health-sector responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from the perspectives of strengthening health systems; leadership and governance; resource allocation and financing; service delivery, human resources, and medical equipment and supplies. Please click on the link below for further details.

<https://www.hst.org.za/media/Pages/SAHR-2021-Call-for-Abstracts.aspx>

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

M&G Free Live Webinar on NHI and Covid-19

Covid-19 has challenged and crippled the country's healthcare systems, putting NHI in the spotlight. The pandemic highlighted the importance of NHI for all and that we cannot afford to ignore the scheme. However, has the pandemic actually brought the public and private health sectors together and helped lay a better foundation for NHI implementation? What about the precarious state of our public healthcare facilities and systems being exposed on a shocking scale? What about corruption in the healthcare sector, amplified during the crisis, which is a huge underlying threat to any attempt to ensure the success of NHI? The crisis has now forced stakeholders to rethink their healthcare insurance strategies and implementation. Join this live webcast as we discuss the progress of NHI, reflect on lessons learnt from the crisis, debate the long-term implications, leadership in state-owned healthcare, new role of medical schemes, medical aid premiums, importance of preventive treatment during primary care, digitising towards universal healthcare and the next steps post Covid-19.

Date: 3 November 2020

Time: 14.30 – 16.00

Venue: Johannesburg

Cost: Free

Contact: Wan E: az.oc.gm@lnaw

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Expert Grant-Writer

Closing Date: 28 October 2020

Health Systems Trust (HST) seeks an expert grant-writer with significant experience in HIV and AIDS, TB, public health, health systems strengthening and developing successful grant proposals to the US President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and other large-scale US funders. The role of the grant-writer is to work collaboratively with the HST bid team to conceptualise and write proposals for upcoming grant calls issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and potentially for others in future.

Senior Accounts' Assistant

Closing Date: 28 October 2020

The Health Systems Trust (HST) wishes to appoint a Senior Accounts' Assistant, based in the Durban office, to provide financial and accounting technical support to programmes and projects as required for the implementation of various tasks. This is a fixed-term contract position, renewable based on availability of funding.

Visit the Health Systems Trust website for any new updates on:

<https://www.hst.org.za/Pages/Careers.aspx>.

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