COVID-19 resources through Friends of Millbank website

David Vassallo

I would like to update you on the ongoing work of the Friends of Millbank further to our last letter published in BMJ Military Health.1 Friends of Millbank is a society that celebrates the heritage, achievements and ongoing relevance of military medicine, normally holding talks at the former Royal Army Medical College (now Chelsea College of Arts) in Millbank, London. The Royal Army Medical College was the British Army’s centre of excellence for postgraduate military medicine and tropical health, and the home of the Journal of the RAMC (now BMJ Military Health), between 1907 and 1999.

Our meetings ceased when the UK instituted a national lockdown in March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. We now hold monthly online talks, open to all, advertised through our website. As our contribution to tackling the pandemic and misinformation on the subject, we continue to collate the best official online resources into a regularly updated COVID-19 portal on our website which we recommend to your readers.2 In this description, names in italics refer to links, prime examples being ‘World Health Organisation’ [WHO], ‘GOV.UK’ and ‘NHS – Latest advice’.

Once online, start with the thought-provoking personal perspective ‘LSHTM Viral Podcast – Peter Piot’s battle with COVID-19’. Piot is director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (see ‘LSHTM – COVID-19 Resources’) — and he fell seriously ill with COVID-19 in March 2020. The ‘RSM Live – COVID-19 Series webinars’ are excellent value. Frontline health professionals will benefit from ‘Coronavirus – e-Learning for Healthcare (e-LH)’ and ‘St George’s online course’. There are excellent international courses: ‘WHO – Online courses for COVID-19’, ‘Ebola, Cholera, Polio’.

Keep abreast of WHO – Online courses for COVID-19, ‘There are excellent international courses: NHS – Latest advice’.

Series webinars’ RSM Live – COVID-19 (see ‘School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine COVID-19’). Continue to be inspired by Organisation [WHO], ‘GOV.UK’ prime examples being ‘World Health and tropical health, and the home of the Journal of the RAMC (now BMJ Military Health), between 1907 and 1999.

The economic effects on society are huge (‘IMF – National Policy Responses to COVID-19’), hence the drive to ease lockdowns, see ‘COVID-19 Policy Tracker – The Health Foundation’ for England, and ‘Lockdowns around the world’. Easing lockdown prematurely risks further waves. New outbreaks can escalate exponentially if unchecked, especially if new variants of the virus prove to be more infective or resistant to vaccines. The guiding principles are Test, Trace and Isolate (‘WHO’).

The most effective prevention measures are ‘Hands, Face, Space and Air’: hand hygiene, masks, physical distancing and fresh air ventilation, with personal protective equipment in healthcare settings (‘WHO’, ‘CDC’). See also ‘A history of the medical mask’ and ‘CDC – Cloth face coverings – DIY guide’. Other control measures are quarantine (of asymptomatic travellers) and isolation (of symptomatic persons and their contacts), see ‘COVID-19 Symptom Tracking’ and ‘COVID Messenger’ shows the situation around England.

COVID-19 deaths continue rising sharply worldwide (as of 12 February 2021, over 2.3 million deaths and 108 million cases have been recorded since the first death on 11 January 2020 (‘WHO’)). The USA has sustained over 480,000 deaths and 27 million cases, far higher than anywhere else (‘Johns Hopkins University Dashboard’). Catastrophe threatens low-income and war-torn countries (‘COVID-19 Resource Centre – The Lancet’), but also those with divergent government policy responses: Brazil has suffered over 237,000 deaths, second only to the USA (‘Johns Hopkins University Dashboard’).

Resurgent malaria, measles and other illnesses, due to disrupted prevention campaigns or healthcare systems, are seriously compounding the global effect, best shown through excess mortality rates (‘Office for National Statistics’, ‘Our World in Data’).

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Vassallo D. BMJ Mil Health August 2021 Vol 167 No 4
This is not a time for complacency, or to let down our guard (Stay Alert!). Lives may be lost by undue haste. Stay informed, stay safe, stay well.

Collaborators  not applicable.
Contributors  I am the sole contributor to this letter.
Funding  The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.
Competing interests  None declared.
Patient consent for publication  Not required.
Provenance and peer review  Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.
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To cite Vassallo D. BMJ Mil Health 2021;167:292–293.
Received 13 February 2021
Accepted 16 February 2021
Published Online First 4 March 2021

BMJ Mil Health 2021;167:292–293,
doi:10.1136/bmjilitary-2021-001812

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