

# Time to pull together



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It is now hard to imagine a world that isn't permanently changed by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). We don't know whether this is an event like 9/11 or the 2008 global financial crisis—where life will mostly go back to the way it was—or whether the institutions and practices of the future will transform in ways that we can't yet imagine. The success of the world's scientists—along with strong political and social leadership—will determine which scenarios unfold, so it is time to focus on what we can all do to help.

On the political front, there is finally some progress as exceptional public servants have emerged as the face of the crisis. Within the United States coronavirus task force, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has appeared as a powerful and uncompromising voice along with Dr. Deborah Birx. Since 2014, Birx has led the highly successful President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which is one of the greatest international efforts to tackle infectious diseases. That Fauci and Birx are becoming better known to the world, along with their counterparts in other countries, as the steadfast and consistent messengers during this crisis is reassuring for citizens and for the experts who are working tirelessly to find answers.

And indeed, there are very important questions to answer. Will recovery from the first infection confer lasting immunity? Will the first vaccine that proves it works cause side effects that undermine its value? Will the vaccines under development trigger neutralizing antibodies? Do widely used inhibitors of angiotensin-converting enzyme promote or inhibit infection? Will the broad-spectrum antiviral drug remdesivir or viral protease inhibitors thwart the virus?

Then there are also public health and epidemiology questions. Do school closings help or hurt? What happens if hospitals become overwhelmed? If we discover an effective vaccine or drug, can enough be made and delivered to everyone? What are the long-term effects of this crisis on mental health, social well-being, and the economy? What happens when social restrictions, like those in China, are lifted?

We can draw hope from the science at work. I

continue to be inspired by the research papers on COVID-19 submitted to *Science* and appearing on preprint servers around the world. The only way questions will be answered is if scientists can do their work, because scientific knowledge is often the key to knowing what actions to take. So, institutions need to do everything possible to allow these folks to get to the lab safely. Research institutions need to shut down all functions except for clinical care, research on the virus, and public health communication. To support these vital operations, institutions need to provide childcare for scientists and staff whose children are now home from school. And they need to alleviate concerns about the future for these staff by extending tenure clocks, guaranteeing status in graduate school, and extending postdoctoral contracts.

As for the scientific community who are not working on the virus—we know well that other major problems still exist, such as climate change, inequality, and other diseases. It is understandably very difficult to pause research in other arenas for an indefinite amount of time. This crisis is calling for extraordinary measures, and your supportive responses deserve recognition. Working from home will make it safer for those who must be in buildings and laboratories to do work related to the virus—fewer people in the hallways, lunchrooms, and other public areas will slow the spread

of the virus so that work on COVID-19 can continue. If there is a way for you to assist without slowing these labs, volunteer to do so. If you have colleagues who are working on the virus, an offer of your time to keep an eye on their children or call upon their elderly relatives who are lonely can make a difference.

On so many fronts, this is a battle of a lifetime and a test of our responsibilities for each other and the strength of our compassion. For our part, *Science* will continue to report the news, and make research on COVID-19 freely available as quickly as possible, and we will also continue to support and advocate for the scientists around the world who are leading the charge. Let's maintain social distancing, but pull together, hard. We must. We will.

—H. Holden Thorp

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# Science

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