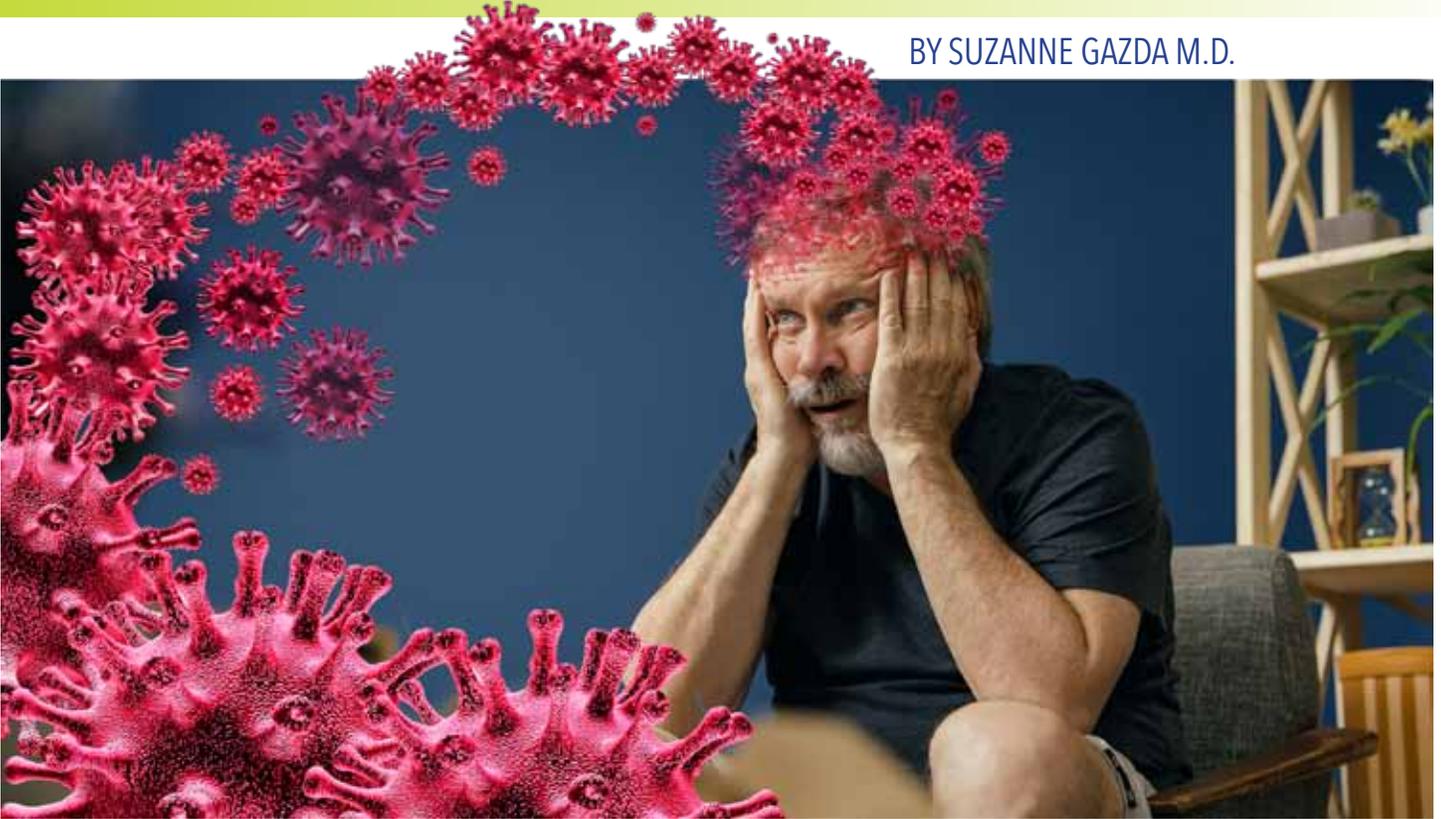


THE MIND ON CORONAVIRUS

BY SUZANNE GAZDA M.D.



We are halfway through one of the deadliest flu seasons in the last decade and yet few of us seemed to notice or care. We paid very little attention to the risks and took almost no special precautions. The flu vaccine was a complete failure, but no one is doing much talking about that either. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that from October 2019 through February 22, 2020 there have been 35 million cases of seasonal influenza, with 300,000 hospitalizations and approximately 30,000 deaths.

But despite these figures, the fear of the Coronavirus and the COVID-19 infection has assumed massive proportions at home and on a global scale.

The most prominent symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath, which may appear two to 14 days after exposure. The majority of people experience mild symptoms similar to a cold or flu, although the illness has caused death in medically compromised individuals. As such, the CDC has concluded that COVID-19 poses

“no immediate health risk for most individuals.” This particular virus seems like it is highly transmissible and is certainly acting a lot like the flu in terms of its ability to infect a large number of individuals.

I just listened to a recent **podcast** with Dave Asprey and Dr. Samuel Vessiere; it is very well done and definitely worth the time to listen as well.

Dave’s guest, Dr. Vessiere, is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, co-director of the Culture, Mind and Brain Program, and an associate member of the Department of Anthropology at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Dr. Samuel Vessiere states, “The human mind is really, really, really bad at estimating the statistical probabilities of anything. And human minds have evolved to specific cravings for different kinds of information, in particular, anything that conveys information about potential threats or danger.”

His perspective and concern was additionally highlighted in a **widely read article** that recently appeared in Psychology Today, "The Coronavirus Is Much Worse Than You Think. How COVID-19 is infecting our minds, not our lungs."

In it Dr. Vessiere writes, "The coronavirus is quite simply, and almost exclusively, a moral panic. There is a clear evolutionary advantage to this trait: we are better off over-interpreting rather than under-interpreting danger. COVID-19 is turning out to be a remarkably intelligent evolutionary adversary. By exploiting vulnerabilities in human psychology selectively bred by its pathogen ancestors, it has already shut down many of our schools, crashed our stock market, increased social conflict and xenophobia, reshuffled our migration patterns, and is working to contain us in homogenous spaces where it can keep spreading. We should pause to remark that COVID-19 is extraordinarily successful epidemiologically, precisely because it is not extremely lethal."

He continues, "We are suffering from a Coronavirus cognitive epidemic because of how these current times are exploiting our cognitive vulnerabilities. In some ways, this evolutionary process of defense may enhance the pathogenicity of the virus, creating a smarter virus that maximizes its reproductive fitness and, as it spreads, then creates ecological unique conditions in which it can continue to breed."

So, could our fear and anxiety intensified by 24-7 news alerts and a torrent of information (and misinformation) be fueling the spread and strength of this virus? With the relentless barrage of negative news stories, our "fight or flight" survival mechanisms are continually engaged as are our evolutionary pathogen detecting mechanisms. Now consider the impact when this all gets applied to large classes of people, many of whom become dehumanized for no reason. Not only is this hurtful, it causes a plague in and of itself that erupts from reigniting old strains of racism and xenophobia.

This is co-evolution and shared humanity - or perhaps, inhumanity - at work. This virus has the ability to evoke the worst in us or the champions in us.

Indeed, there is just so much to think about here...but we must reflect upon all aspects of these very kinds of situations as it simultaneously impacts the wellbeing of the very people our profession strives to serve every day.

Maybe we are in the midst of a pandemic and if you don't get Coronavirus this year, perhaps next year is "your" year...for it is certainly not going to go away. No doubt there will be many future "smart" viruses on the horizon. We have seen this before and the basic chemistry of viral inception informs our current and future knowledge and it should ideally inform our actions. Yet, here we are.

So in all of this maybe, just maybe, there will be an awakening to the foundations of health that work best to ward off all disease, both infectious and noninfectious types.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the number one cause of death globally, taking an estimated 17.9 million lives each year. Based on the latest figures available from 2016, on average, someone dies of CVD every 38 seconds, which represents over 2,300 deaths from CVD each day. Where is the panic over these statistics and over the monumental escalation of all chronic disease in children and adults alike?

The foundations of health include a few basic things and you'll find more "healthful" advice in our "**Fighting and Preventing the Flu**" printable, available here or on our website under Medical Resources.



1. Eat a low-inflammatory, non-GMO organic diet with many more colorful plants on your plate than meats.
2. Exercise and stay active.
3. Aim for 8 hours of sleep per night.
4. Lower stress and enhance stress management.
6. Have loving social connections and a strong community of emotional support.
7. Get out in nature, reduce exposure to EMFs, chemicals, toxins and live life with a sense of purpose that allows you to stay hopeful, positive and committed to a daily practice of gratitude.
8. Don't smoke or overindulge in alcohol. And of course...
9. Wash your hands thoroughly.
10. Stay home if you are sick with the flu or experience upper respiratory symptoms (and always consult your primary care physician with any concerns).



As polarized as our world and society is today, we are still all in "this" together.

Let's remember that the things which strive to separate us are not nearly as powerful as the things that unite us all. This to me will always be front and center and the unfolding story of humanity. And what ultimately makes us human.

Zivijio (which is a Czech word taught to me by my grandfather meaning "to a long, good, healthy life")
And with hope and healing,
Suzanne K Gazda, MD

"Everything we do before a pandemic will seem alarmist. Everything we do after will seem inadequate."
Michael Leavitt



Dr. Gazda's mission is to serve her patients and humanity. All of the staff at Suzanne Gazda M.D Integrative Neurology welcomes you to be part of this remarkable healing journey. We're here to help, to heal, and to give you hope.

As Dr. Gazda says, *Without hope...none of us could survive.*

For more information, contact us at 210.853-3967