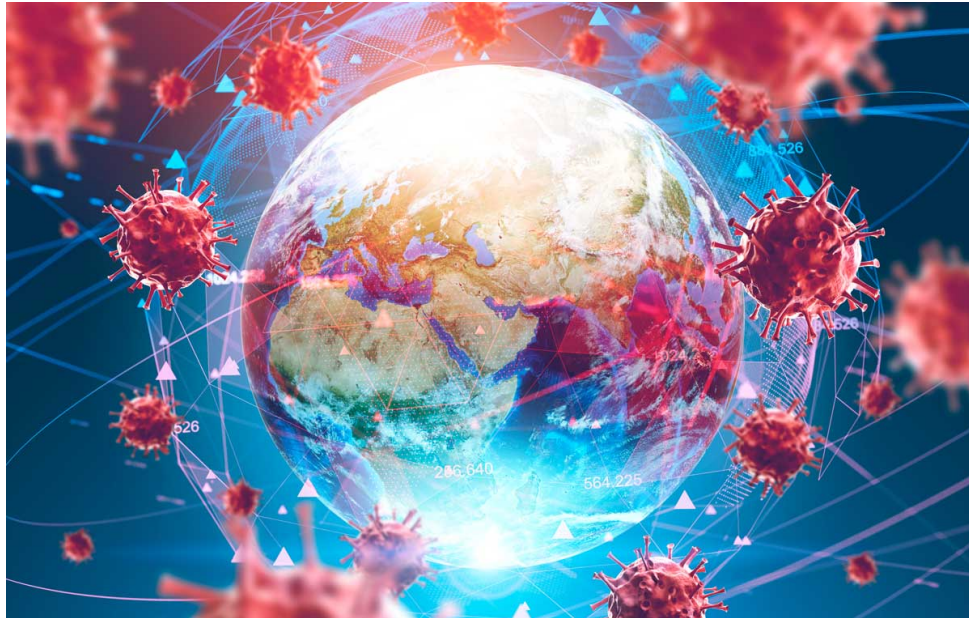


How our world has changed...what do we do now?

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I am positively sure that everyone would agree that “things” have changed over the last two years. Some of you will remember when JFK was assassinated, when the planes hit the World Trade Center and when you heard there was a virus originating somewhere in China and it was coming this way. I absolutely remember where I was when I saw the news report that they had diagnosed two COVID-19 cases in Seattle. We were in the Florida Keys and it was MLK, Jr week, 2020. Something immediately hit me like a ton of bricks that this was NOT going to be good. It gave me a horrible feeling way down deep inside [shock]. As I conveyed these feelings to my husband, his initial response was, “Honey, it is ONLY two cases” [denial].

When we look back at the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918, according to the CDC website, “it is estimated about 500 million people or one-third of the world’s population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. Mortality was high in people younger than five years old, 20-40 years old, and 65 years and older. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40 year age group, was a unique feature of this pandemic.” The problem with the spread of this strain of H1N1 was it was first seen in the military personnel as WW1 was in full swing. With the movement of people (especially via ship and train) and it quickly spread across the globe.

During the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919, we did not have flu vaccines, antibiotics for secondary infections, disinfection, hygiene and sanitation were unavailable or limited, quarantine and isolation techniques not fully understood

or were unable to be implemented, and again, we did not know what we know now. And it changed several generations in this world forever. What they encountered, as part of the world family, is most likely not much different than what we have experienced in the last two years. Surely, technology has advanced but the toll that a crisis like a pandemic takes on society, physically, psychologically, and emotionally does not change much over the ages.



The statistics for COVID-19 are still unclear. There has not been consistency in how the numbers and true cases have been reported across the globe. That all must be sorted out however, to date, total confirmed cases in the US are, per CDC website, 79,099,886. Confirmed deaths are 955,016. There are no reported numbers of people that have recovered. Worldwide numbers as follows: Global reported cases: 438,517,285. Global reported deaths: 5,964,630. There are no reported numbers of people that have recovered. This is staggering. It represents great loss.

In my research for this discussion, I found that there are perhaps tens of thousands of articles and research papers discussing every aspect of the post-pandemic societal effects that you can imagine. It has been researched from every angle concerning every country, profession, vocation, population, ethnic group, culture, race, demographic, and age group. I suspect it will be researched and re-researched for a long time in the future. We always want to approach things better in the future. The question is, will we or can we? Or are we, as humans, predictable instinctually?

We have recognized from the beginning that because COVID-19 was a novel virus, we knew little about it. Compared to the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919, and the Asian Flu of 1957 we did have an advantage of advanced technology. Indeed, that is all good. We have learned a lot during this last two years of "on the job training." We must remember, historically, that is when we

tend to learn and innovate the most is when we are pushed to the limit(s). But what about the things we may have lost in the process?



There are common threads among most of the many research articles that I have studied and that is what will be discussed in this writing. What did we lose during the last two years? I have discussed this many people (anecdotally) and the literature supports their in-common experiences, as listed below:

1. Some lost loved ones and were unable to properly grieve because of the mandatory restrictions placed to fight spread of the infection.
2. Some contracted the virus and recovered completely
3. Some contracted the virus and have not recovered completely
4. Some lost their job or livelihood
5. Fear and reality of loss of financial security
6. Change in the work environment (i.e., work from home)
7. Change in the work environment (i.e., healthcare workers)
8. Crowded living conditions (work at home & homeschooling)
9. Inability to go to church to worship
10. Concerns about physical fitness
11. Most everyone felt totally isolated when shut down or shut in
12. Social distancing ‘separated’ from their extended family and loved ones.
13. Felt loss of support from their loved ones
14. Inability to travel to visit their immediate family or loved ones
15. Disconnect from social groups
16. Loss of hopes and dreams
17. Felt like life was “on hold”
18. Constant and prolonged restrictions
19. Inconsistency of news reports/information
20. And many others

What is documented, reported and what most have expressed is that the stress culminated in a perception of a living on a roller coaster. Once one thinks that

they have coped and adapted to the “last thing,” the next “new thing” broadsides them. They cannot catch up. It can be overwhelming when it is over and over and over. This has occurred in every aspect of life for every single human being on this planet no matter what their societal or familial responsibilities were/are. It is the usually the “pile up of stressors” that push our equilibrium off the cliff.



It is often said, “what is perceived is reality.” The perception of the loss of anything that we hold dear can result in grief. In stable times, we have ‘some’ control over our grief and how it is processed. Remember, a loss is a loss. It does not matter what that loss is. The process of grief must be respected and honored for one another, as we recover from what we feel we have lost in the past two years. It will be different for everyone. We have all lost something. It may be simply “time” you have lost and will never get back. What may be important to some is not to others. And it does not matter. It is our perception, and it must be respected.

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was a famous psychiatrist and devoted her career to research on death and dying. She was an expert on loss. When there is loss, there is grief. She wrote a book in 1969 entitled *On Death and Dying*. One of her famous accomplishments was the identification of the *Stages of Grief*, as follows: 1. Denial 2. Anger 3. Bargaining 4. Depression 5. Acceptance. Other researchers since have expanded the stages: 1. Shock and Denial 2. Pain and Guilt 3. Anger and Bargaining 4. Acceptance 5. Depression, reflection, and loneliness. It is important to review these steps as we each cope with losses we have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We must know what is normal, what is not, what is prolonged and when we need assistance.

As I read no less than 100 articles, there was one that stood out beyond all the rest that I would fully recommend for everyone to read. It sums this subject up

better than I ever could [it is on the public domain] :

[Loss and Resilience in the Time of COVID-19: Meaning Making, Hope, and Transcendence](#)

The last section of this article is entitled *Bouncing forward: Adapting to our Changed World*. We started out discussing “How our world has changed... what do we do now?” We are resilient. We are strong. My humble advice is that we do not forget to honor and love each other, respect, and take time for each other in this process. We are all in this together. We are all we have. In the end, it is only “US.” We are resilient. We are strong.

By GPA Board Member Jill Whitfield, CNM, MSN

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