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The evolution of understanding



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By Nate Smelle

INITIALLY I had planned to fill this editorial space by continuing to unmask the hollowness of the anti-masking argument. However, in light of the response to the first half of the unmasking I have put part two on hold until I've had the chance to read through the 300+ pages of alleged "evidence" provided to me by two of the three anti-maskers who responded to last week's column.

Having begun this research project over the weekend, so far the so-called "evidence" appears to be no more credible than the pseudoscience commonly used by flat-earthers, climate change deniers, and conspiracy theorists. While I still remain unconvinced that I should throw away my mask and invite strangers to sneeze in my face, one of the anti-maskers comments inspired me to dig deeper into the connections between the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

Upon investigating the individual's claim that pandemics have nothing to do with the climate crisis, I discovered that there is a significant amount of evidence proving that as the planet heats up infectious diseases are able to spread more easily. For example, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, "Many of the root causes of climate change also increase the risk of pandemics. Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural purposes, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and potentially contact other animals or people and share germs."

As global heating persists and habitable land get swallowed up by rising sea levels, opportunities for species to exist within their natural ecosystems are becoming less and less. In turn, all species are continuously being forced to exist within an ever-shrinking portion of the planet. Furthermore, as we - and by we I mean all species despite the fact humans are leading the way - foul our nest, the ecosystem which gives us life becomes more and more contaminated.

The exact origin of COVID-19 is still unknown, yet many experts believe it jumped from non-humans to humans at one of Wuhan's open-air wet markets. Acting as a sort of microcosm, these markets cram animals - often endangered species - into close quarters which allow viruses from different species to swap genes.

The World Health Organization attests to the connection between the changing climatic conditions and the spread of infectious diseases, reminding us on its website how Roman aristocrats would retreat to the hills each summer to avoid malaria. Recognizing that the WHO has repeatedly warned us that COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic to threaten the survival of the human species, we need to look at adaptations to our way of life that have proven their effectiveness in terms of fighting and preventing the spread

of infectious diseases.

Revisiting my notes from the video conference call with environmentalist and scientist Dr. David Suzuki and National Observer CEO and editor-in-chief Linda Solomon Wood that I participated in last spring, I was reminded of how Suzuki pointed out the opportunity the pandemic has created to redesign and rebuild our society in a way that nurtures a sustainable future.

In order for us to rebuild, we first need to endure the threat to our species this convergence of crises has created. That requires us to pay close attention to the evolving information generated by the scientific community; and, employing that information in our daily lives.

As Suzuki recently stated in an article published on www.straight.com "Sometimes we need to be reminded of the basics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public-health officials have repeated clear messages about handwashing, physical distancing and mask-wearing. These are relatively simple preventative measures to limit the virus's spread. Responding to climate change isn't so simple, yet it's every bit as urgent."

Just as Roman aristocrats learned that they could remain free of malaria by retreating to the hills each summer, we have learned that we can reduce the potential of spreading the virus by washing our hands, physical distancing, and wearing a mask.

The very nature of scientific discovery is based on the evolution of information. The information produced by the scientific community evolves as its', and our awareness grows. Whether we are talking about solutions to the pandemic or the climate crisis, the full effectiveness of the information produced by the scientific community is only realized when we are willing to implement it as individuals.