

## **LIFE AFTER COVID / MUSIC EDUCATION AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS.**

*COVID-19: Long-term effects - Medically and psychologically.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has tipped and turned the universe upside down and negatively impacted much of the society in unprecedented ways, like never seen before.

The measures put into place to bring some relief to the public health systems around the world were and are amongst others:

- \*Border closures
- \*Travel restrictions and
- \*Lock-downs (In many levels/forms, depending on the country)

These in return affected:

- Labour markets around the world,
- People's buying and eating habits and
- Economic activities, worldwide.

The impact of these disruptions on peoples mental health, is of critical concern, especially in relation to every country with their set of rules and regulations.

Within the last two decades, mental health has placed a heavy demand on treatment costs of the medical budgets within countries and general society as a whole.

In the United States alone, is it estimated on \$200 billion (USD) plus, per year. It is expected that this will rise substantially as a result of the pandemic, for the coming years, in every country.

The mental health aftermath of COVID-19 has been severe.

The United Nations, urged the international community to protect vulnerable populations, around the world during this pandemic, in their statement published in May 2020.

Research identified teenagers and young adults as a population of concern. They are facing enormous disruptions to their education and may even have a set back of a year or two. Living situations were forcefully changed and the economy has experienced a significant impact worldwide. People will feel the long-term effects for decades to come.

Within the above-mentioned study, there were also findings, which placed light on the disruptions and heavy workload college students are experiencing.

In this study the following findings were documented; linking lifestyle disruptions to mental health:

- 1: There were large disruptions to physical activity by the patients, their sleep and time management, particularly at the onset of the pandemic.
- 2: There was significant fall in mental health over a broad spectrum of those involved in the

study, with a dramatic increase in depression in particular.

3: The risk factors of depression have diverged dramatically from “normal times” during the pandemic. There is evidence that the pandemic has impacted severely on the link between the maintenance of peoples’ lifestyle and their mental health.

4: The disruption of any physical habits, can lead to depression, thus the attempt to restore habits, with a short-term intervention may not be beneficial.

It is found that the relationship between physical activity and the well-being of a person is primarily driven by the patients’ mental health rather than his/her lifestyle, which bears out that if there are in any changes in lifestyle habits, that this may lead to early symptoms of depression. This can be directly correspond to the physical activity and mental health disruptions, driven by the patients’ response to the pandemic and the rules and regulations imposed by governments across the globe.

It was clearly seen that the people who were able to maintain their lifestyle and habits during the pandemic, are the patients who were able to maintain their mental health to a better degree, despite facing major disruptions in their lives.

It can also be understood that these people may be those who, prior to the pandemic, were most adaptable and are less prone to stress and anxiety.

Based on this UN Report, herewith an article review from a medical doctor who is currently busy with her community service year in South Africa. This is Dr Chané Pretorius’ (MBBCh) perspective on the COVID-19 situation:

**“The effects of COVID-19 on our health**

***COVID-19 has changed our lives in various ways. From social distancing, working from home, wearing masks and hearing about death all around, it has been a strenuous journey and affects every part of our lives.***

***Our quality of life has decreased in many ways. The lines between work, social life and leisure time became blurry. We sleep more but wake up unsatisfied. Anxiety and depression have increased significantly. We fear contracting the virus ourselves. We fear for our family and friends. We are feeling stuck and unable to move forward in life.***

***Research found that young parents are more stressed during these times due to the difficulty of balancing life. Parents in general are at a higher risk for unhealthy living. Stress leads to unhealthy cravings. Working from home means that there is more time to cook at home, but research has shown that the consumption of carbohydrates has increased. Combining this with the decrease of activity levels resulted in a higher incidence of obesity. Obesity itself is a risk factor for many diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. It also results in a weaker immune system putting us at a high risk for contracting the virus. It also delays the healing process. The main obstacle for maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the lack of adherence. Research has also found that people who use alternative medicine are more adherent to***

*healthy lifestyles than those who don't. They smoked less or stopped smoking and decreased their alcohol intake. They exercised regularly and followed precaution measures more strictly.*

*Paradoxically, poorer communities were faced with food insecurity. The lack of good sanitation facilities and the necessity for extra hygiene precautions remains a challenge. COVID-19 has however affected most people badly in terms of financial security as well. The virus affects all economic classes, people from different backgrounds and all ages. The elderly population and people with other diseases are at higher risk. Hospital restrictions, preventing families to say goodbye, has a negative impact on our mental health. As do the news of all the lives taken by the virus.*

*Working and doing schoolwork from home has led to the increased use of digital display devices. Work and schoolwork are done on the computer and television or games such as PlayStation is being used more often. This affects our eyes negatively. Common problems include eye strain, dry eyes and nearsightedness. Common symptoms of eye strain include headaches, dry eyes, blurry vision and shoulder pain. Having to wear a mask all day also results in dry eyes. The American optometrist association recommends taking a break from your screen every 20 minutes to look at something that is 20 feet (+6 m) away for 20 seconds. They call it the 20-20-20 rule. Optometrist visits are also advised. People with diabetes and high blood pressure can be affected more severely as they are already at risk for eye problems if their illnesses are poorly controlled.*

*It is however not all negative. General hygiene principles have improved significantly. This results in a decrease of other illnesses. Telemedicine and the world of technology is assisting in continuing with patient care and other career opportunities.*

*It is important that we know and understand ourselves and ask for help when we need it. We need to take back control of the things we can control. Eating healthy, exercising regularly and making phone calls, or going out for a coffee (if it is safe to do so), with friends and family is important. Self-discipline and good time management is important to ensure that we spend enough time on work, sleep, leisure time and socializing. The future feels uncertain and it might feel as if our freedom has been stolen, but it is important to seize the moment and take care of yourself.”*

Based on research and findings recorded by doctors, nurses etcetera, since COVID started to date, are that most people who had the coronarius recover completely within a few weeks, with many being asymptomatic, and not showing any symptoms.

But there are instances where some people, even those who had mild symptoms of the disease, continue to experience “delayed symptoms” after their initial recovery.

These are now known as the "long haulers" and the conditions have been called post-COVID-19 syndrome or "long COVID-19" and are considered to be effects of COVID-19 that persist for more than four weeks after the initial diagnoses, in patients.

Older people and people with many serious underlying medical conditions are the most likely to experience lingering COVID-19 symptoms. However young, otherwise ‘healthy’ people can feel unwell for weeks to months after being infected with COVID. We in South Africa strangely

experience the situation where people that are 'super fit' who for example ran marathons etc. are the persons worst effected.

The following are common signs and symptoms that can linger over time, as found by this research/study:

- Fatigue,
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing,
- Cough,
- Joint pain,
- Chest pain,
- Memory, concentration or sleep problems,
- Muscle pain or headache,
- Fast or pounding heartbeat,
- Loss of smell or taste,
- Depression or anxiety,
- Fever,
- Dizziness when you stand,
- Worsened symptoms after physical or mental activities,
- Organ damage.

Organ damage may increase the risk of long-term health problems:

- **Heart** - Lasting damage to the heart muscles. This can be experienced even in people who shown mild COVID-19 symptoms. This may increase the risk of heart failure or other heart complications in the future.
- **Lungs** - The type of pneumonia often associated with COVID-19 can cause long-standing damage to the alveoli in the lungs, which causes scar tissue, that can lead to long-term breathing problems.
- **Brain** - COVID-19 can cause strokes and seizures later. COVID-19 may also increase the risk of developing Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease.
- **Blood clots and blood vessel problems** - COVID-19 can make blood cells more likely to clump up and form clots. While it is common knowledge that large clots can cause heart attacks and strokes, this compared to COVID-19 complications, much of the heart damage caused is believed to stem from smaller clots that block the tiny capillaries in the heart muscle/s.
- **Blood clots** commonly occur in the lungs, legs, liver and kidneys.

Additionally, there is the reality where some people were treated in hospitals' intensive care unit, with mechanical assistance such as ventilators etcetera. Simply surviving this experience can make a person more likely to develop post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression and anxiety at a later stage.

Because it is found that the general symptoms differ from person to person, it is more difficult to predict long-term outcomes from the COVID-19 virus in all its mutations and forms. Scientists

are looking at the long-term effects seen in related viruses, such as the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) as well.

Many people who have recovered from SARS have gone on to develop chronic fatigue syndrome, a complex disorder characterised by extreme fatigue that worsens with physical or mental activity, but does not improve with rest. The same may be true for people who have had COVID-19.

Many long-term COVID-19 effects are still unknown and how the virus will affect people over time is undetermined. Ongoing research will continue for years to come.

**With the medical issues presented above, I now provide my findings and perspectives as Music Teacher from when the South African COVID Period started (March 2020):**

Since COVID arrived, life changed - everybody had to adapt. Whether you are a doctor, a nurse, a teacher or a researcher that is now stuck on an island...

Suddenly we found ourselves living an online life; from ordering groceries online, working from home, teaching online - which resulted in a daily life where 90% of our awake time is spent on some or other device.

However it is my belief that there is more to life than the online lifestyle forced on us, thus it is very important to have non-screen activities and it is essential to make time for yourself, with things that you like to do, for example:

- Gardening
- Reading a book
- Learning a new song on the guitar
- Learn to do mosaic tiling
- Painting etcetera.

As a teacher, lecturing was forcefully presented online for a long period. The positive aspect of this as a teacher was the fact that we could continue and proceed through the syllabus, as well as seeing teaching in a whole different 'light'. However there are challenges with lessons being presented online, other than those we normally experienced teaching in-person.

While most teachers assessed matters speedily to ensure, the progress on the syllabus was still underway to be finalised in time, keeping in mind the activities for the academic year, there where there was minimum support for teachers and parents from schools and/or the Government Education Department.

During full lock-down it was propagated that all could continue online, having people connected with each other and receiving news etcetera, however, it is in my opinion that this created public panic and exacerbated the negativity and uncertainty even more.

In many cases we have found that the parent's role changed from being mom/dad, to being mom/dad and "home teacher" as well. This created additional strain on households, due to the fact that parents still have their work to do - although many were home based. The work "deadlines" still had to be met, all while maintaining home activities and 'online schooling' for

their children added to their already overburdening workload.

In some situations this caused relationships to break into pieces because of the sudden change in the routine as couples knew life to be before COVID hit - financially and mentally.

However, I would like to think that not only bad was created from the total lock-down period - In other situations it is my positive thoughts and hope that families are connecting again; enjoying more quality time together with each other as well as with their children and family. A possible positive outcome of COVID may hopefully be that the family dynamics have changed in a positive way.

Furthermore I already saw the effects of “social -distancing” {specifically with the very young persons, aged four years to ten years} and the trepidation that we will face within a year or two where the world will have next generations who are “trapped” in their world of ‘isolation’ because this was the way of life since the end of 2019. (Exact dates depend on the country).

These effects include:

- People who are afraid of physical contact and human touch.
- Young persons not knowing what support, affection and love is.
- Students that cannot receive a hug from their teacher, after receiving a sterling after a performance, for example.
- It is extraordinary, to have witnessed the importance of having a network of support in such times, which was sadly, in many cases, absent.

With regards to relationships and family:

For many the past time was disastrous, with the most inhumane rules and regulations inflicted on entire societies;

1) The ripple effects are families who haven't seen each other for many years. Family living abroad - normal family time of the “once a year get-together” was not able to happen - some families haven't seen each other for more than three years now. Children that could not travel back home to say a last goodbye to their dying parent/s during this time.

2) The normal Sunday evening dinner dates at grandparents are now not possible - We as adults can grasp the concept as this is a requirement to keep the elderly people's risk to the minimum however, a child cannot understand, why he or she cannot visit their grandparents on a weekly basis as this was a weekly ritual in the past. In some cases Old-Aged Homes were closed, where no visitors/family were allowed for four months on end, and even still now, depending on the section of the home.

3) Long distance relationships.

People in long distance relations were unable to arrange their normal “together time” - some spreading over two to three years now.

## **A final conclusion of the negative outcomes from a teacher's point of view after COVID:**

1) Everyone I know of, adults and children, are currently taking additional supplements, {vitamins and minerals} which the person may not have taken before COVID - thus the body is now receiving supplementary help and not maintaining the natural balance thereof by itself/via the person's diet and sun exposure, as it should. After COVID - the body will need to learn how to operate without the additional assistance, not to mention the massive financial implications of purchasing these supplements.

2) People are already experiencing sight problems with life being online - we are spending more time staring at a screen than ever before, placing strain on the eyes and the continual focus, as per the medical doctor's article; leading to further health concerns.

3) With classes being presented online, the amount of time at the computer with earphones has increased tremendously as well. Audiologists recommend that earphone settings should never be turned up above 60% level. Experts call this the 60%/60min rule.

4) With our schedules being arranged around the computer - as a teacher, we often find ourselves having some snacks in-between sessions, with no proper breaks, teaching six to eight hours and students who have their normal school day presented online - obesity may be the added negative outcome, because of limited time left between online sessions, as well as the reality that many find ourselves sitting majority of time with recent developments - muscles deteriorating and not having as much "active" time anymore, may be a direct result of living online - which can lead to further health problems, as per the medical doctor's article.

5) Activities/Classes requiring more and more time and workload increasing to name only a few factors that can influence sleeping patterns and creating additional problems later.

6) Prolonged mask wearing results in:

- Throat infections.
- Skin rash due to face irritation.





-Irritative skin reactions on our hands with a methanol buildup in the body, because of excessive sanitiser use, multiple times, on a daily basis.

After all this research as mentioned above, it is my opinion that only the **STRONGEST** will survive this period relatively unscathed, which can continue for three to four years, or even longer.

I end with a positive quote, to keep the spirits up:

***“There is a powerful driving force inside every human being that, once unleashed, can make any vision, dream, or desire a reality.” - Anthony Robbins***

*This article was compiled with medical input from Dr Chané Pretorius. Included in this article are:*

- *Cover article written by Dr Chané Pretorius.*
- *Publications released on th 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, from the vaccine research group compiled by the Mayo Clinic staff,*
- *UN reports,*
- *The findings and experiences from a teacher’ s point of view, written by Tdrinda Woods.*