

BOOK REVIEW

The COVID-19 Catastrophe: What's Gone Wrong and How to Stop It Happening Again

By Richard Horton
2020; Pp. 133; Polity Press; ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-4645-9

Time and time again we are being reminded of the brutality of both world wars in the past century. Nonetheless, the Spanish flu pandemic which has led to tens of million mortality is largely neglected until the outbreak of COVID-19 which draws a similar grim outcome to it. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, hence it is paramount for us to grasp the lessons learned from this pandemic. Also regarded as the “infodemic” as there are a plethora of conspiracy theories surrounding this pandemic, thus we must obtain our facts from a reliable source. This book by Richard Horton, the Editor-in-Chief of the Lancet, provides a trustworthy source of information, in which we can reflect upon in this crisis.

This book consists of seven chapters. In the first chapter “From Wuhan to the World”, the author succinctly explains the most probable origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the proposed time frame it disseminates to other countries. In the next chapter “Why Were We Not Prepared?”, he provides a first glimpse of the various reasons why most countries are not prepared, despite the early warning by scientists.

In the following two chapters: “Science: The Paradox of Success and Failure” and “First Lines of Defense”, the author highlights the deficiency in some countries which fail to act swiftly, resulting in a state of calamity. He also gives credits to countries that have learned from their past experiences with SARS, jumping into action immediately and acting decisively against the virus to nick it at the bud, thus preventing further loss of lives.

In chapter five “The politics of COVID-19”, the author does not shy away from criticising the political failure of big nations. Despite having the best scientists and technologies at their disposal, they have failed to prepare accordingly, causing a catastrophic consequence of mortality. Rather than admitting their mistakes, they tend to play the blame game and further sowing more disinformation, resulting in more confusion among the public.

In the last two chapters “The Risk Society Revisited” and “Towards the Next Pandemic”, the author reflects that the risks might be our own doing, brought upon by rapid industrialisation and modernisation. He also postulates changes COVID-19 may bring upon to the society, governments, publics, medicine and science, in which if we embrace them, we will be better prepared for the next pandemic, for it will surely arrive, and it may arrive sooner than we think.

I find this book an amalgamation of cold hard facts and thought-provoking philosophies on COVID-19. It is an eye-opener and a must-read for all medical and non-medical personnel alike.

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