

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 16

Country: **ROMANIA**

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Among the European countries, Romania was hit relatively early by the Covid-19 pandemic. Government enforced special emergency restrictions also relatively early, including travel restrictions, isolation rules for local population at risk, quarantine and home isolation for the huge wave of diaspora who came from red regions of Europe. Those rules prevented a huge disaster by overloading an unprepared medical system, as it was all over the world. The police and the army played an important role in enforcing the rules, alongside with the health authorities in helping tracing the contacts and went after the people not following the rules. The media that in general has informed constantly about the risks, the statistics of an illness that had no cure and possible fatal complications. The images from hospitals from Italy and France were suggestive of the risks posed to the public health system in even the most technological advanced countries.

Wearing mask, social distancing and temperature measurements were among the principal preventive measures enforced after the Government declared a national emergency state (16 March 2020 – 14 May 2020), and in the new national status of alert which followed May 15<sup>th</sup>. The initial public reaction to the necessity of wearing the mask indicated that the public understood the benefits and the needs, but also expressed concerns about the discomfort of wearing it for extended periods of time, the issue of increased costs exactly for the persons who are ill, old and disabled and for whom are important to be protected. The needs for the socially assisted persons were covered by the local and national social system care during the period of national emergency state, but after, they will have to face all the new increased costs of life and new social rules. It is understandable for they to feel in danger, to react but their reaction is human.

What it might be more concerning from the medical and social point of view is the “induced” protest, coordinated in the interest of so called “need to restart the activity” to include reactions

against the preventive and protective rules. The mask and temperature measurement are the symbols of the social protection, and any push to restarting industrial and economic activities worldwide should support these basic protective measurements, not work against them. The message should be strong and clear, on all media and internet channels, which is not exactly the situation now.

Being an obstetrician during the days of the pandemics put things in a different perspective. For myself and my colleagues, life is carrying on as usual and we have a huge responsibility to assure the medical assistance for all the pregnant women we assist. A pregnant woman is a special type of patient in the sense that it is most of the time a patient that is healthy not carrying a disease or sickness of any kind. Under the new pandemic we have to screen them and treat them as potential “suspected patients” in a hospital where the manager refused to have a testing program, both for pregnant women and for medical personnel. But in doing so we learn how important is the protective costume, from which the mask is a key part – both for all the doctors and medical staff as well as for all the patients. All our medical personnel is wearing mask full time, 7-12 hours/day, and until now the measure proved to be effective.

As an Ob-Gyn I am used with the mask, I feel it a part of my professional life and I am trying to convince people that there is no way of considering the mask as an enemy but as a protection-like and umbrella against the rain, like a coat against the cold – and as a sign of civilization to protect our colleagues and people around.

The mask is not only to protect ourselves, is for protecting the others – as they are protecting us by wearing a mask.

*In this wonderful late spring of 2020, as a medical professional, the correct words I can say are:*

- *We do not know exactly all the ways the virus may be spread among population*
- *We do not know exactly which is the major way of infection*
- *We do not know which viral load may lead to a major reaction*
- *We do not know if the virus is spreading in the human body by viremia episodes into the blood, or going along the nerves or just by air*
- *We do not know the ways of transmission from the mother to the fetus and newborn*
- *We do not know if the antibodies are protective or just markers of former subclinical diseases*
- *We do not know if the human body is able to clear the virus*

.... *And there are so many unknowns which will be solved in the next months and years, I do hope*

*What it is important is what we do know:*

- *The virus exists and affect human beings*
- *The virus exists and kills the most fragile persons - older relatives, our teachers and our mentors*
- *The virus exists and may affect our relatives and friends, our colleagues and families not only by killing the predisposed ones by obesity, glyceimic disturbances, heart and renal chronic diseases, but also, if they survive, leaving them with severe complications which make their life even more difficult*
- *There is no way of predicting a single person might react, how much will be affected and which will be the quality of life after recovering, at any age, from children to over 100 years old persons*
- *The prevention of viral spreading is a moral and social obligation mostly of the young and adult population which might have subclinical or symptom-free forms of the infection and might spread it among the others*
- *Prevention is the best way of protection*

In my view, using correctly and all the time of the mask, glasses, hand and personal hygiene –which includes also the gloves- are important. Related to gloves - needs a lot of precaution because the hygiene of the gloves is also important, otherwise the gloves might give a false impression of assurance.

The utmost importance is to spread the word and inform everybody in a correct way and using messages that will help everybody grasp the importance of protection, and that will give very little chance of the “always against” part of the society to spread incorrect information.

Since a long time, Cicero (106-43 B.C.) was saying, “*Ut imago est animi voltus sic indices oculi*” [The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter]. Over the mask the eyes are image of soul and mind. By wearing a mask in these times, in a proper way and in proper places, we show the respect for ourselves by respecting the others.