

Clinical pharmacology between two worlds in times of crisis

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The year 2020 did not begin well even for our hitherto quiet and affluent part of the world. A decades-awaited pandemic of an entirely new and serious viral disease has become reality to an extent by which most real experts were taken by surprise.

Clinical pharmacologists have the misfortune, or fortune, of moving between two completely different worlds during these days of crisis.

The former is the real world of health and science that has responded to the crisis situation in a, perhaps surprisingly, rapid, rational, and appropriate manner. The health sector is being organised in accordance with pandemic plans and crisis management, hospitals are shifting to crisis mode. Despite initial shortcomings, this process is going on remarkably well. We must keep in mind that none of us could have experienced a situation like this ever before, so it is not possible for everything to be proceeding perfectly smoothly. However, nearly everyone in this world is behaving in a rational way, trying to be of utmost use and working extremely effectively. After a while, some of us will certainly ask whether they could have done more in this crisis, but even the slightest contribution by each of us is valuable these days. In particular, I wish to express appreciation for the attitude of our students, future doctors, as well as nurses and other health professionals who are showing truly admirable effort right now. Also, the involvement of a number of purely research centres in addressing issues related to the current crisis situation is, in a word, great.

On the other hand, however, there is the virtual world of information that, at the moment, seems to be revealing its bad side mainly. What I am referring to is not the world of our regular media the mainstream of which has long been synonymous with sheer, depraved tabloid, but rather the world of specialist information in the media and on social networks. Even during the period of pre-crisis affluence, there was a number of not exactly good-quality media and pu-

blicists in this world. With the advent of the pandemic, however, their finest hour was unfortunately yet to come. An enormous demand for information, along with the fact that three months into the existence of a novel disease no pharmacotherapy with a proven effect can be available, have caused that we have nearly constantly been overwhelmed by useless and confusing information noise in the previous weeks. A flood of zero-value information has seemed to have completely overshadowed all rationality and expertise. The less knowledge of their own the authors of such communications have, the more erroneously analysed conclusions from very dubious sources proliferate, some of which are on the edge of outright fraud.

While I have no doubt that most such analyses and second-hand information occurred as a result of attempting to help, one cannot fail to overlook that many others arose from a simple desire to come to the fore, gain a sense of importance, or even strengthen the position of deceptive methods, such as the so-called traditional Chinese „medicine“ and the like. Also, in our country, dozens of upstart specialists in treating viral pneumonias have emerged from out of nowhere who, on Monday, read the chapter on virostatics in a textbook; on Tuesday, found the meaning of the ECMO abbreviation on Wikipedia; and, on Wednesday, started drawing up pseudospecialist recommendations and information emails or making bad translations into Czech of English texts badly translated from Chinese. Although they may have failed to study aspects of the „ordinary flu“ or the difference between the meanings of COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2, a number of consumers of their information, veiled in specialist terminology, may not have recognised this, so this activity of theirs can sometimes cause real damage.

Real experts on the issue in question, of whom there are quite a few even in our country, have been relegated to the very background in this world, which is quite understandable



since they do not happen to have much time for similar activities right now. Moreover, we have witnessed how, at times, even truly leading experts and professionals in their fields have given in to the temptation to address issues that they only have superficial knowledge of. By doing so, however, they can also do considerable harm since both the lay public and professionals recognise their authority and dare not question their views. In fact, we have been given a sad opportunity to observe that even world-renowned journals have succumbed to this „covid psychosis“ and published, one after another, papers the quality of which falls short of the standards of our students' bachelor theses, with reputable institutions producing, on their basis, guidelines for the treatment of really serious conditions.

Fortunately, truly relevant opinions and information seem to be finally coming to the

fore these days, so we may have overcome the period of media rumours of the ill effects of ACE inhibitors and ibuprofen, and over time, hopefully, we will even handle the difficult-to-understand rumour of universal antiviral effects of antiparasitics as well as the – apparently completely immortal – rumour of the existence of a panacea in the form of high vitamin C doses.

I would be very happy if, within our field, we could gradually help the professional sector to return to a sensible view of pharmacotherapy and its professional bases. I would also like to

express the hope that clinical pharmacologists will be able, with their critical look, to contribute to finding optimal pharmacotherapeutic strategies in challenging situations that are still ahead of us. And that they will manage to convince even the most eloquent colleagues of theirs that if one has nothing to say, it is definitely better to say nothing.

At the end of this editorial, I am afraid I have to share some sad news with you that I have received earlier today. March 30 saw the passing of Professor Folke Sjöqvist, one of the leading European clinical pharmacolo-

gists and the initial chairman of the European Association for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics. It is a great loss for all those who knew him as well as for clinical pharmacology as a field. As the editor-in-chief of this journal, I am extremely proud that Professor Sjöqvist was kind enough to write a short editorial for the 1/2009 issue of our common journal *Clinical Pharmacology and Pharmacy*. Dear colleagues, I would like to invite you to take a little of your precious time at this very moment and reread his text that, even after 11 years, has lost none of its relevance.