



March 2020 Newsletter

How much is your health worth?

I recently heard that the timeshare industry is still taking guests on tours despite the COVID-19 pandemic. People are still traveling to Lake Tahoe to spending quality time with a salesperson randomly selected with whom they discuss vacation ownership. Some guests' "gifts" are \$100 to \$200 to spend 90 or 120 minutes with a random stranger with whom you won't ever see again. These guests are usually couples and some families attend with their children, so if I divide by 2 adults, that breaks down to roughly \$33.33 to \$50 per hour.

Given that the Dow Jones has plunged into the negative, I can't even look at my stock portfolio much less consider buying a timeshare. What wisdom is there in continuing this charade? Who are these people who throw caution to the wind and travel ANYWAY?? The only conclusion I can come up with is they don't understand the implications of what they're doing.

Who among us has chosen to pay attention to the CDC warnings, the health professionals who have advised to practice hand washing and social isolation? Why are we doing it? To protect our own health of course! And to protect the health of our community, and to prevent the spread of COVID-19 worldwide. After all, the less contact we have, the less community acquisition we risk. I understand that some of us have to travel, have to work, and have to care for others. But this kind of leisure travel seems just plain ignorant.

History always repeats itself.

Why is the Coronavirus a bigger deal than a seasonal flu? It has to do with RNA sequencing (genetics). Seasonal flu is a "human virus" because the DNA/RNA chains that make up the virus are recognized by the human immune system. This means that your body has some built in immunity before it comes around every year. You get immunity one of two ways, exposure to the virus, or by getting the flu shot. The World Health Organization tracks novel viruses that originate in animals. These novel viruses usually transfer from animal to animal; pigs in the case of H1N1, birds in the case of the Spanish flu. But once one of these animal viruses mutates and starts to transfer from animals to humans, it becomes a problem. Why? Because we have no natural or

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acquired immunity to it. The RNA sequencing of the genes inside the virus isn't human, and the human immune system doesn't recognize it so we can't defend ourselves against it. Sometimes, the mutation only allows transfer from animal to human and for years its only transmission is from an infected animal to a human before it finally mutates so that it can now transfer from human to human. Once that happens, we have a new contagion phase. Depending on this new mutation, that's where we find how contagious or deadly it will be. H1N1 was deadly but it did not mutate in a way that was as deadly as the Spanish flu. H1N1's RNA was slower to mutate and attacked its host differently.

The Coronavirus quietly existed only in animals until the day it mutated and made the jump from animals to people. Only animals could infect a human but here is the scary part. In JUST 2 SHORT WEEKS, it mutated again and gained the ability to jump from human to human. Scientists call this quick ability "slippery". The Coronavirus, not being a "human" virus where we would have some natural or acquired immunity, took off like a California wildfire spreading to all ends of the earth destroying more than just our health. And this is because humans have no known immunity to it. Doctors and researchers have no known medicines for it and it just so happens that this particular mutated animal virus changed itself in such a way that it causes great damage to human lungs. That's why Coronavirus is different from seasonal flu, or H1N1 or any other type of flu. This one attacks human lungs and it's already mutated AGAIN, so that we now have two strains to deal with making it twice as hard to develop a vaccine. We have nothing in our scientific arsenals to combat this.

History has shown that fast and immediate closings of public places has helped in the past pandemics. Philadelphia and Baltimore were reluctant to close events in 1918 and they were the hardest hit in the US during the Spanish Flu. Right now, it's hitting older folks harder than younger, but this genome is so slippery that if it mutates again, and it will, no one knows what it will do next.

Be smart. Be responsible. Stay home. Enjoy family time, catch up on those rainy-day projects, do your taxes, have some fun. And whatever you do, share this with people who just don't "get it" yet. Please do this for you, for your family, for your community, and for humankind. Do it for our economic recovery, our way of life and our retirements.

Eileen Liu, 2nd Vice President of the South Lake Tahoe Cancer League, cancer survivor, and immune suppressed neighbor who appreciates your efforts.

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