

COVID-19: The Good News

Two recent articles in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine suggest that much of the gloom and doom scenario regarding Covid-19 may be unfounded. The omnipresent Dr. Anthony Fauci ((From the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD (A.S.F., H.C.L.); and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta (R.R.R.)) discusses new proposals for Covid-19 case fatality rates.

In the cited article, in which he references the publication by Guan et al., Dr. Fauci "...suggests that the overall clinical consequences of Covid-19 may ultimately be more akin to those of a severe seasonal influenza (which has a case fatality rate of approximately 0.1%) or a pandemic influenza (similar to those in 1957 and 1968) rather than a disease similar to SARS or MERS, which have had case fatality rates of 9 to 10% and 36%, respectively."

[1, 2]

Another article, published online at STAT, with a similar but more cogent viewpoint, is expressed by Dr. John P.A. Ioannidis. Among his many positions, Dr. Ioannidis is C.F. Rehnborg Chair in Disease Prevention at Stanford University, where he also is a professor of medicine, health research, and policy. He is also a professor of statistics at the School of Humanities and Sciences and co-director of the Meta-Research Innovation Center at Stanford (METRICS) at Stanford University.

Excerpts from the Dr. Ioannidis STAT article:

"Reported case fatality rates, like the official 3.4% rate from the World Health Organization, cause horror — and are meaningless. Patients who have been tested for COVID-19 are disproportionately those with severe symptoms and bad outcomes."

"Reasonable estimates for the case fatality ratio in the general U.S. population vary from 0.05% to 1%."

Finally...

On April 20, 2020, USC and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health released preliminary results from a collaborative scientific study that suggests infections from the new coronavirus are far more widespread - and the fatality rate much lower - in L.A. County than previously thought.

The results from the first round of the ongoing study by USC researchers and Public Health officials, using antibody testing "estimates that approximately 4.1% of the county's adult population has antibody to the virus. Adjusting this estimate for statistical margin of error

implies about 2.8% to 5.6% of the county's adult population has antibody to the virus- which translates to approximately 221,000 to 442,000 adults in the county who have had the infection. That estimate is 28 to 55 times higher than the 7,994 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported to the county by the time of the study in early April.”

If one uses the recent number of COVID-related deaths in L.A. county of 663 and uses 442,000 as the number infected with COVID-19, the case fatality rate is 0.13%. COVID-19 is a different disease but has mortality similar to the seasonal flu.

If nothing else, these medical scholars give us a reason for optimism. My office staff and I will continue to follow CDC recommendations for decreasing the spread of the virus and flattening the curve. I will continue to give interested patients advice on improving their immune system functioning in hopes of preventing the significant illness that can affect a minority of COVID-19 infected individuals.

In that vein, I hope this information decreases your stress level. Few things depress one's immune function more than stress.

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1. Fauci, A.S., H.C. Lane, and R.R. Redfield, *Covid-19 - Navigating the Uncharted*. N Engl J Med, 2020.
2. Guan, W.J., et al., *Clinical Characteristics of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in China*. N Engl J Med, 2020.
3. Ioannidis, J.P.A., *First Opinion A Fiasco In The Making? As The Coronavirus Pandemic Takes Hold, We Are Making Decisions Without Reliable Data* STAT, 2020
4. Sood, N., *USC-LA County Study: Early Results of Antibody Testing Suggest Number of COVID-19 Infections Far Exceeds Number of Confirmed Cases in Los Angeles County* USC and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, April 20, 2020.