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Fear of Going to the Hospital, High Anxiety Over Transmission, Politics Tramples Science

LR is a long standing patient of mine. She has had children killed by random gunfire. Her husband died of cancer years ago. She not unexpectedly has severe anxiety in addition to her diabetes, obesity, and asthma. This week I tried treating her cough and asthma with steroids. Unfortunately, one of the side effects of steroids is to increase blood sugar; her sugar went above 500 (normal is up to 100). I convinced her to go to the ER but LR took one look at the busy ER and left – she was afraid of catching COVID. The next day I prevailed on her to go the ER, she was hospitalized. Fear of COVID delayed her hospitalization by several days; almost fatal delay.

Test rate positivity is now at 1.1 % in Massachusetts whereas in Florida it is 5.5% but recently Florida was much higher. I still have significant #'s of disabled COVID positive patients.

Fear of COVID is both real and appropriate. Part of this is the economic devastation that this pandemic is wreaked on our society but especially the poor. Food insecurity, a now standard question for every patient I engage with, is both real, frightening and new for most of my patients. But we as health care professionals also need balance appropriate concerns about COVID with sound medical advice based on our clinical judgement. We need to be current with research literature; there is a great deal we still don't know about COVID. Our clinical judgement needs to always include a healthy “dose” of skepticism whenever one is discussing a new illness such as COVID, which brings us to the [plasma scientific and political fiasco](#). I am not so concerned about the fact that plasma was approved under emergency authorization. It is the process and the hype without scientific basis.

But first, the science, from Up to Date, the medical “encyclopedia” (it is more than that actually) “Convalescent plasma and hyperimmune globulin are obtained from individuals who have recovered from an infection and have generated an immune response against the infecting pathogen. Neutralizing antibodies are thought to be the main active component; other immune mediators may also contribute. The major difference from other plasma products is that convalescent plasma is obtained from donors who have recovered from a specific infection. Ideally, it contains antibodies to the pathogen at sufficient titer and biologic activity to provide passive immunity to the recipient... Over 57,000 units have been administered to patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Limited evidence suggests improved outcomes in hospitalized individuals with severe COVID-19 (requiring supplemental oxygen) if convalescent plasma is given early in the disease course, although additional trials are needed to determine the

optimal recipient characteristics and timing. Other uses of convalescent plasma such as post-exposure prophylaxis and treatment of early disease are under investigation.”

A scientific outcry ensued after FDA Commissioner Hahn’s misleading statement: 35 out of 100 Covid-19 patients “would have been saved because of the administration of plasma”. On Monday nite, [Hahn acknowledged his error](#). No such correction has come from either HHS (“I don’t want you to gloss over this number”) or the executive branch. The [executive branch’s response to the FDA’s initial withholding of approval](#) was saddening. Bottom line: “While [Trump called it a "historic announcement,"](#) the treatment is unlikely to make a major difference against COVID, a virus that's killed more than 170,000 in the United States”.

The race is on as to whether the Democrats or the Republicans can control the narrative on whether or not the executive branch is responsible for the extent of this pandemic. An [article on the increased popularity of Brazil’s leader](#), Bolsonaro, highlights the importance of perception and narrative control. This tension will climax in how much of a perceived role the executive branch has in the [approval of any vaccine before the election](#), the ongoing impact of the pandemic on our economy, and the ongoing impact of the lack of a national policy. This 30 second video, produced by a colleague of mine, highlights the importance of controlling the narrative. <https://youtu.be/ScoqVEqQBac>. This could make the difference in encouraging people to vote – in favor of science. Your reactions are welcome. I am also working with others creating video’s and head shot screens in different races that I am involved in. I will likely be needing volunteers of health care professionals. **New way to register to vote :** <https://vot-er.org/>

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