Is COVID a Harbinger of the Zombie Apocalypse?

I know everyone is tired of talking about COVID, but unfortunately, this disease isn't done with us yet. This entire process has been a living experiment and the virus has been calling the shots.

Our medical community has performed a herculean effort, first in combating the virus with little to no information, then in developing vaccines in record time. But, as I just said, it's not over yet.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to be winding down… or is it? While the numbers have been down here in the USA, India has recently had a massive surge in cases. If things keep going the way they are over there, chances are pretty good that they're going to surpass us in total confirmed cases of symptomatic patients. I imagine the final death toll there will be worse than our own, mostly because of the level of medical care. Still, the advances our medical community has made in understanding this disease and how to treat it should help them out tremendously.

Is the Vaccine the "Silver Bullet" Everyone's Hoping for?

Here at home, we're approaching a 50% vaccination rate. Still far short of the theoretical 70% to reach herd immunity, but

enough that it is helping slow the spread of the disease. Still, it has been well proven that vaccination isn't perfect and doesn't necessarily make one safe from the virus. Rather, it is supposed to help limit the effects of the disease.

I'm not really sure how that works, especially considering that I know several people who have been fully vaccinated, but are in the ICU, intubated because they can't breathe on their own. If that's the expected results of a successful vaccine I don't want to see the effects of an unsuccessful one.

Let me stop here a moment, in the interest of fairness. From what I understand, no vaccine is 100% effective. We still don't know the effectiveness rate of the ones we are using. For example, back in March the CDC ran a small study using 3,950 health care workers. In this study, they found the Pfizer vaccine, the first one to come out, is 90% effective 14 days after receiving the second dose. It could just be that the people I know who are ill fall within that 10% for whom the vaccine doesn't work. Just by chance.

But I'll have to say, that doesn't leave me feeling all warm and fuzzy. There's still a lot we don't know about this disease and the virus is mutating, giving us various strains we know even less about.

One thing we do know though and have known for some time, is that the antibodies from defeating COVID-19 only stick around in the body for a few months. It is unknown yet whether the antibodies from the vaccine will last any longer, but there is no reason to believe they will. If that's the case, there's a very real need for a regular schedule of booster shots. These are not uncommon for vaccines but, even so, there has been little said about a booster for COVID.

What's more, while some of the same pharmaceutical companies who worked on vaccine research and production have been working on boosters there hasn't been the interest and sense

of urgency. Part of that is probably because Congress has made no provision for boosters in the more than four trillion dollars they approved in the various COVID bills.

This whole thing is an ongoing experiment, with you and I as the lab rats. We won't really know the results of the experiment for some time; and by then it will probably be too late to do anything about any permanent problems. Caused by either the disease or by the vaccines.

Speaking of Permanent Damage

This leads us to what I suggested in the title of this article. Namely the long-term effects of COVID-19. For instance, I received some startling news about this a few months ago, which I passed on to my readers. While that information was unconfirmed at that time doctors have since been hard at work, studying the disease and trying to learn about its long-term effects. Now there are confirmed cases of people with long-term negative effects on their hearts, lungs, and brains, along with joint pain, fatigue, dizziness and shortness of breath.

A recent study published in Science Translational Medicine also found that some COVID-19 patients have such severe permanent lung damage as to warrant the need for a lung transplant. The specific damage to the lungs is pulmonary fibrosis, an irreparable scarring of lung tissue which makes it harder to breathe.

There is also clear evidence of permanent inflammation and even damage to the heart itself. This damage is also in the form of scarring, much like pulmonary fibrosis; but can also include muscle cell death. According to information on the CDC website, patients who are supposedly "over" the COVID-19 disease can still suffer from multi-organ damage with unknown long-term prognosis. There just hasn't been enough time to see what the long-term effects will be.

A recent study gives us the clearest idea of the long-term impact of COVID-19[1], at least for patients who have been affected in one way. This study, by UK Biobank, is based upon brain scans of patients who have recovered from COVID-19, as well as a comparative control group who did not have the disease. The study was made possible by the fortunate coincidence of a study done by UK Biobank before the disease outbreak, in which they scanned over 40,000 participants. This allowed them to invite back individuals in 2021, which had originally been scanned and do a new brain scan, so that they could compare the two.

The result of the study, which involved 394 COVID-19 patients and 388 controls, was a clear indication that those who had been infected with COVID had a significant loss of brain tissue. This loss of grey matter affected both patients who had been hospitalized for the disease and those who had not.

Interestingly enough, the night before I found out about this study, my wife and I encountered a friend of hers at an event. That friend had suffered through the COVID disease and had finally overcome it. But in that conversation, she shared with us how her memory and thinking had been affected. She had always been intelligent and articulate, but now finds herself unable to remember many details, suffering from long-term memory loss and losing her train of thought in the middle of a sentence. Is this the future for people who have had this disease? If so, how many will be so affected and how severely?

So where are the Zombies?

No, we don't have any zombies yet; but that's not to say we won't. I'm not referring to COVID-19 zombies, but perhaps something considerably worse. Several people I know have felt that this disease is nothing more than a preparation for something much more severe. Could it be the zombie apocalypse? I don't know; but I'm much more of a believer than I was a

month ago.

We're all familiar with zombie movies, even if we haven't watched any ourselves. The plot is repetitive, at least for the beginning of the movie. It's always a virus that attacks the brain, leading to people becoming zombies. The rest of the movie is more unique, as those who are not so infected work to try and wipe out the zombies, ensuring their own survival.

But here's the scary part… while SARS-Cov-19 isn't the only virus that infects the brain, it is the most prevalent. The Zika virus is another which has been demonstrated to have the ability to affect the brain, although that is much more likely to happen in a fetus, than it is in an adult.

Here's the thing; if the Zika and COVID-19 viruses can cause brain damage, what can other viruses do to the brain?

The truth is that we just don't know and finding out might prove to be very costly. We may never know, until there is a for-real zombie outbreak somewhere in the world. Considering how rapidly the Coronavirus spread, that outbreak could circle the globe before it is even identified, just like in World War Z.

An Intentional Outbreak?

As controversy heats up about the possibility of a lab accident releasing the virus onto the world, along with the possibility that this is an "engineered" virus, one scary piece of evidence that has come out is that the Wuhan lab has a lot more different strains of bat virus hidden behind their walls than previously thought. Apparently, many of these were collected from caves where bats are known to dwell.

The idea that such a leak could occur, creating an outbreak, really isn't as far-fetched as some would like us to believe. Vincent Munster, a virologist at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories, has stated "Nine out of ten times, when there's

a new outbreak, you'll find a lab that will be working on these kinds of viruses nearby." If that's the case, just what sorts of things do they have hiding behind the walls of all those labs?

Was the Wuhan lab performing research in bio-warfare? That's something which we'll never know. Although the idea the Chinese government orchestrated the release of this virus as an act of bio-warfare, with the intent of improving China's financial standing in the world has been floated. But, that theory just can't be proven, without credible witnesses from China coming forth to provide testimony. Either way, the results are basically the same.

Do They Have Worse?

The big question is what else is hiding in that lab and others. I understand the need for research into virology, so that medical science can develop the means of protecting us from these microscopic perils. Yet at the same time, the risk in such research is very real. We've already seen that.

But even if they don't, there's still a very real risk from such viruses. All viruses tend to mutate; that's how we have so many strains of influenza. What if two or more different viruses in that lab manage to get mixed, either intentionally or by mistake and mutate into something that really does have an affinity for brain tissue? What would we end up with then?

Viruses that damage brain tissue don't necessarily have to turn people into Hollywood-style zombies for them to become dangerous. All it must do is take away enough of their cognitive ability to make them reasonable people, while making them more violent. The resulting people would be close enough to the movie zombies to be very dangerous.

Keep in mind that viruses try to spread all on their own. We've seen that with COVID-19. So, it won't take infected

zombies biting victims to spread the disease. Rather, all it will take is them stumbling through the world, coughing, to spread the disease around. The virus itself will do the rest. Considering how quickly COVID-19 spread, the results could be devastating, especially when you consider that millions could be infected before we had any inkling that the virus was really the zombie virus.

Protecting Ourselves from the Zombie Virus

In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a very real training opportunity for all of us, preparing us for a much worse pandemic in the future. Whether the next pandemic ends up being the expected zombie apocalypse or not.

Fortunately, other than zombies biting us, the same precautions that we've been using through the COVID pandemic should help us make it through the Zombie pandemic as well. The only thing we might need to upgrade is our masks. The masks we've been using are really to protect us from spreading the virus when we exhale or cough; they don't really do much to protect us from what we might be breathing in. That's what social distancing is supposed to be for.

Changing our medical masks for gas masks with a bio-filter should provide the necessary protection against breathing in the zombie virus. The only problem is such filters are hard to come by. Even so, they can be produced. If we all have gas masks in our stockpile, all we'll need to do is buy the filters. Seeing how quickly the government and industry got things moving to provide hand sanitizer, PPE and respirators for COVID, I have high hopes that they'll be able to produce bio-filters when necessary.

But what about Protecting Ourselves from the Zombies Themselves?

This depends a lot on the zombies; specifically, how violent they become. I imagine that in most cases, any virus that would eat away at people's brains would also tend to eliminate their ability for violence. But that's not a sure thing. The possibility exists that anyone so affected by the zombies could become violent, even to the point of biting people.

So how will we deal with that; that's going to be the question? Things will have to get pretty bad before the government declares open season on zombies, allowing us to kill them outright. So, our defense is going to have to be about protecting ourselves from attack, rather than using the adage of "the best defense is a good offense."

More than anything, that will mean having our homes secure. Zombies breaking through doors and windows may make for good movies; but it's not realistic. If people are in that bad a shape, they're probably not going to have the strength and coordination to break through much of anything. If they do, it will be more of an accident, from them flailing around, than anything.

So, I wouldn't retire your favorite zombie head basher yet; but I would take some time to reinforce your doors and windows. If you've done that and they still break through, the existing laws on self-defense will permit you to do what's necessary.