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## Journal Pre-proof



Beyond the pandemic: The truth of life after COVID-19

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## **Beyond the pandemic: The truth of life after COVID-19**

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### Highlights

- Post COVID-19 pandemic trauma is spreading, and psychological counseling has not been timely followed up.
- The author elaborated on how to overcome the trauma based on the experiences as doctor fighting the pandemic.
- The study encourages readers to overcome the difficulties of the epidemic, find things that inspire us and make our lives truly worth living.

### Abstract

This study focused on how to deal with the psychological trauma from the perspective of a doctor on the front line of the fight against COVID-19. As the pandemic continues to ravage our world, post-pandemic psychological counseling urgently needs to be addressed. Based on the experience of fighting the epidemic, this study discusses the psychological changes since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. Taking a 19-year-old with breast cancer as an example, this study considered how to find spiritual comfort, and examined how to find meaning in today's complicated world and lives, as well as turning the crisis into an opportunity for spiritual renewal and adding meaning to our lives. It is hoped that this study will inspire readers to overcome the difficulties of the epidemic, find strength and see it as a life-changing opportunity.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; trauma; mission; truth; life.

## **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic is in its third year. China has been battling the outbreak since early 2020<sup>1</sup>. To date, we are still fighting SARS-Cov-2 and the Omicron variants on multiple fronts<sup>2</sup>. The dramatic changes brought about by COVID-19 have affected every aspect of people's lives. Some of the measures to control the epidemic, including isolation, access restrictions and economic shutdowns, radically changed psychosocial behavior, and induced psychological trauma, especially China's strict prevention and control policies have affected large numbers of people. Nevertheless, there is a lack of timely research on post-pandemic trauma and psychological counseling<sup>3</sup>. Here, I would like to share some thoughts about the trauma under the epidemic from the viewpoint of an infectious disease specialist. It is hoped this will inspire readers and help them overcome psychological trauma and bring a new perspective on life in the post-pandemic era.

### **Trauma haunts many people and psychological counseling is urgent**

Before COVID-19, like everyone else around me, I had made plans, looked forward to the future, and expected things to go according to my wishes. We live so uneventfully for so long that we become desensitized to major events. Even in the hospital, faced with life, death, and severe diseases, we do things according to procedure and remain unperturbed. However, when COVID-19 hit, things changed.

In the early days of fighting COVID-19, the knowledge of the Novel Coronavirus was limited. We risked our lives in the fight against an unknown enemy. From public officials to medical staff, even ordinary Chinese citizens, people paid a high price for the first victory against COVID-19. In the most difficult times, I held multiple roles: a doctor in a fever clinic, a comforter of anxious patients, a collector of throat swabs for SARS-Cov-2 tests, and a member of staff collating patients' data. Initially, I was lost, terrified, overwhelmed, and had never felt so close to death. I lived alone, apart from my family. What I could do was immerse myself in various roles, held on through psychological trauma, dedicated to the fight against the epidemic, and looked forward to overcoming it as soon as possible. People around me, including colleagues, friends,

were also suffering from trauma; some even struggled with feelings of powerlessness and desperation. We pulled through the hard times and made hard-won progress.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 became a global pandemic<sup>4,5</sup>. At this moment, we are still experiencing waves of the Omicron variants. I often wonder, what does COVID-19 bring after we have suffered so much? How do we define ourselves in a medical career under such conditions? It could be said without exaggeration that human destiny and behavior have been forced to undergo momentous changes, including lives, work, study, and entertainment, among others. Many people experienced psychological distress, even to the brink of collapse. Personally, I have experienced a range of emotions and situations. Facing life, death, illness, science, religion, mission, work, family, solitude, incomprehension from others, pressure, and so on, which are intertwined as diversely as cytokine signaling pathways.

How do we respond to these huge changes? What is the most essential change that COVID-19 has brought? What are the key factors in the chaos and how do we make the right choices? We may complain that the epidemic and the competitive society have caused a seismic shift in our day to day lives, increased social inequities and adversities; however, complaining leads nowhere. The real difficulty is how to embrace life according to inner ideas and think independently. I cannot help but think, the most important thing I can do under the pandemic is to find things that touch our soul truly live our lives.

### **Turning crisis into opportunity**

Whenever I think about things in life that touch our souls, I miss a friend named Xiao Yue, who was once one of my patients. At that time, I was a medical intern and studied thoracic surgery. Xiao Yue was a 19-year-old girl with advanced breast cancer. She had no choice but to have one breast removed, leaving thick stitches on her chest. She said to me: "I want to be a doctor in the future, specializing in breast reconstruction, so that many patients like me can get their lost breasts back. I hope to be able to stand out with my proud chest."

Xiao Yue was gone a few years later, leaving no legacy. However, her words had a

lasting impact on my life. As I look back, how should I use my friend's words to guide me in difficult situations like the pandemic? Do I "go with the flow", or follow my mission, even in hard times? I do not want to be a mindless and insensitive man, but look forward to a colorful life, although there will be a lot of difficulties. How then do we find the truth about life? As a doctor, I will do everything I can to help patients, and guide them to understand the disease, life, and death. As a thinker, I would like to devote myself to the integration of medical science, my mission as a doctor, passion for the unknown, and real-life, give meaning to life, not only to the individual and families but also to devotion to society and medicine.

Reality and dreams, just like the double helix of DNA, are closely intertwined and create beautiful lives. Maybe this is where the truth of life is hidden. Life and death are nothing more than a dreamlike gathering of particles that constantly assemble and disintegrate. We should face reality and try to make the best of our lives and make them as fulfilling as possible.

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