The Times They Are a Changin’… Take 2
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In August of 2019, my SCA President’s Message was titled “The Times They Are a Changin’” and focused on a future vision and new initiatives which I was hoping to achieve during my term. The title of this message was derived from Bob Dylan’s famous lyrics:

Come gather 'round people, wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth saving
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'
At the time, little did I appreciate how prophetic the title of my message would become. Today, we find ourselves immersed in one of the most extraordinary challenges that we have ever confronted in the modern era—a significant risk to our physical, emotional, and social well-being as a species. I have been astounded by the extremes of the human response to this COVID-19 pandemic, from vices including greed manifesting as hoarding of food and even toiletries to exceptional acts of compassion and kindness exemplified by the virtues of heroism demonstrated by healthcare professionals and so many other essential providers and enablers who have risked their own safety for the protection and welfare of others.

As physicians specializing in the relatively wide spectrum of anesthesiology, perioperative, and pain medicine, we now find ourselves often focused on daily caring for critically ill patients either directly as intensivists or under the supervision of our colleagues in a critical care setting. Our casual lexicon has become dominated with terms and acronyms previously rarely mentioned as well as newer ones—donning and doffing, powered air-purifying respirator hoods (PAPR), N95 masks, PPE. Our focus has shifted to include struggles to obtain equipment to care for our patients and PPE just to protect ourselves, as well as healthcare economics, political struggles involved in maintaining fiscal stability, and even significant ethical dilemmas and the risk of moral injury including consideration for crisis standards of care. When the world reveled during this past New Year’s holiday, who would have ever thought we would be vulnerable to these unprecedented liabilities only a couple of months later.

The times they certainly are a changin’. It is not unreasonable to expect that certain ways we interact with one another professionally, personally, and socially may remain as permanent fixtures in our culture. In our efforts to come together by staying apart, we have become more proficient in communicating and perhaps educating ourselves differently with remote platforms including Zoom, GoToMeeting and Teams. In fact, on Saturday, April 4, SCA hosted a live educational webinar produced by the leadership of the International Committee and SCA Management in a very brief period of time, entitled “COVID-19 Challenges for the Cardiovascular and Cardiothoracic Anesthesiologist.” This session included an extraordinary panel from experts around the world and included over 1,500 registrants from 65 countries. Perhaps one of the small benefits of this crisis will be the mainstream adoption of remote technologies options for communication and e-learning—I believe they will.

It has long been said that the best way to predict our future is to create it—we can control a major part of our destiny following this pandemic by remaining logical, following evidence-based medicine, and engaging in practicing what we preach by promoting social distancing and vigilant hygiene in our professional and personal lives.
among our colleagues, friends, and family. As anesthesiologists, we are known and respected as experts in crisis management, and while we are human and therefore susceptible to physical and emotional fatigue, now more than ever it is important to demonstrate our extraordinary skills, knowledge, versatility, resiliency, and professionalism. We are fortunate to live in a world with exceptional minds who will develop therapies to both manage and prevent COVID-19 from resurfacing to the same devastating extent. While we will most likely be challenged again in the future as we have in the past with other stressors to our well-being, we have hopefully learned enough to better mitigate the dissemination of future diseases more proficiently and efficiently.

The well-known children’s author Dr. Seuss said, “When something bad happens you have three choices. You can either let it define you, let it destroy you, or you can let it strengthen you.” I am fully aware of what is happening in the United States, and having communicated very closely with friends and colleagues throughout the world, I am significantly saddened with the knowledge that tens of thousands have suffered severely.

There will be a better tomorrow. I am confident that we will survive and evolve to become wiser, more versatile, and even more resilient. In addition to benefiting from our experiences, perhaps most importantly we will have learned to be kinder, more sympathetic, and more respectful to one another. No one can develop therapies to help us with these human traits—it is up to us.

My friends, there is still much work to be done. But until we meet again, and we absolutely will during better times, stay safe and be well.

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