

Tackling the virus

Many want there to be an easy answer to quelling the virus. The medics and scientists search for a vaccine but have to warn it could take a long time or even prove a fruitless quest. Some seek better treatments to lessen the death rate from severe cases of the disease. These are the only two solutions to defeating the pandemic.

Others hold to the view that there is some special way that will eliminate the virus as it circulates in any particular country. Many countries are suffering intense debates about whether their governments have done well or badly in controlling the virus whilst limiting the damage virus control methods do to economies and jobs. The bitter truth is looking around the world most governments have adopted central World Health Organisation tenets that increasing amounts of social and economic activity have to be closed down to squeeze down the prevalence of the virus. Only then can gradual relaxations test out how far they can go in restoring a bit more normal life before virus disaster strikes again. Practically all governments that have adopted versions of this approach have ended up with a second wave and the need to renew the abrasive medicine of full or partial lock down.

In the early days of the crisis the cry went out that a massive expansion of ventilators would see us through. This was tried, only to discover the death rate remained high.

A more sustained case has been made out that Test, track and trace will do the job. The theory is if you test enough people, especially those who might be carrying it or have symptoms, and then isolate enough of such people and their contacts quickly enough, you will cut the circulation of the virus. We now see quite a few countries with large test and trace systems have second waves to deal with.

There are five central weaknesses to test and trace. The first is the delay in getting a test whilst people are asymptomatic or unaware that they have the disease. The second is the number of false results from tests which disrupts the data. The third is the refusal of some people to self isolate for a fortnight to make sure the virus has passed them, as people have demands on their lives which makes fourteen days locked in at home difficult. The fourth is the unwillingness of many to self isolate just because they are told they have been in contact with someone with the disease. The fifth is the impossibility of knowing many of the people encountered by a busy person who has travelled or been to populous places.

The organisation of accountable government at national level for good reasons also means that if any country does have success in curtailing the virus it then needs to shut itself off from foreign visitors whilst the virus rages. This can also be difficult given the strong patterns of global business ,travel and trade. Given the lack of success so far by the World Health Organisation in producing ways to remove or tackle the virus there is no evidence world government would have cracked it to justify the lack of

democratic accountability that would bring. The WHO of course does not have to balance curbing the virus with economic consequences in the way governments need to do.