



03 MAY, 2020

Traitors in virus 'war'

Sunday Telegraph, Sydney

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From the privileged protection of herd immunity, anti-vaxxers are using the pandemic to peddle fear over a vaccine that doesn't even exist yet. LUCY CARNE

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More than 234,000 people have died from COVID-19. Among them is my former colleague, Anthony Causi, who died last month, at the age of 48.

A genuinely nice guy and talented sports photographer on the New York Post, he was the beloved husband of Romina and dad to John, 5, and Mia, 2.

"I never thought I would get something like this. I thought I was indestructible," Anthony wrote from intensive care in his last post on Instagram. "If I do make it out of here, I promise you this, the worlds not going to know what hit it."

In a call to a friend, he said he was scared he was dying and was worried for his family. A few days later he died in his New York hospital bed.

And that's the terrifying reality of novel coronavirus. For many of us, it's the first time in our lives we have faced a lethal, invisible contagion with no vaccine or immunity to protect us.

Thanks to modern medicine, my generation has, as Anthony said, felt indestructible.

We were lucky to have never known the ruthless toll of polio, whooping cough, tuberculosis or measles.

We've not witnessed people

come out the other end of illness with legs in calipers or a hearing impairment. Nor have we had our babies cruelly taken by a preventable rash or fever.

Yet, despite bodies piling up globally as we await a coronavirus vaccine, the anti-vaccination movement has failed to retreat into silent submission.

From the privileged protection of herd immunity — courtesy of a vaccinated community — anti-vaxxers are using the pandemic to peddle fear over a vaccine that doesn't even exist yet. Their claims hinge off absurd conspiracies: a potential vaccine is an excuse for Bill Gates to microchip humanity or that coronavirus is a "plandemic" organised by big pharma.

Then there is the utterly insane, like the fantasised link between 5G and COVID-19 deaths. As The Times pointed out, Monaco, the world's first country with functioning, nationwide 5G, has recorded just four deaths. Iran, one of the most severely hit countries with more than 6000 recorded deaths, has no 5G.

In Australia, the anti-vax movement orchestrated a synchronised letter and email spam of politicians last week. The correspondence followed the same prescribed script alleging that the flu vaccine increased the risk of catching coronavirus.

The timing was to coincide with Friday's deadline for all aged care staff and visitors to have a flu vaccine in the hope of protecting our elderly from a potentially deadly winter after a significant number of COVID-19 deaths in Australian nursing homes.

Federal senator Hollie Hughes confirmed to News Corp that politicians had received a "huge" number of the letters, but that they had only served to reinforce vaccine support.

"We are looking at a world without one vaccine shutting down economies and killing people," Senator Hughes said. "I find it astounding that these people can make this argument."

"It is offensive to the vast majority of Australians. I'm not going to waste a tree to reply to them."

Whipping up this insidious storm of misinformation is an army of angry keyboard Karens, who perpetuate dangerous anti-vax myths and paranoia.

Among them is Mooloolabam Allona Lahn, who helped organise the letter blitz.

She plans to run for a seat in Queensland's state election with the Involuntary Medical Objectors Party, which recently

changed its name to the less-transparent Informed Medical Options Party.



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Her Facebook page is a petri dish of propaganda. Ms Lahn had to correct a post last week, but kept comments claiming Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk faked her flu shot. She didn't, she had the jab.

Ms Lahn also used Anzac Day to post a spiel likening Anzac Diggers to anti-vaxxers, claiming both fought for our freedom of choice and that the Diggers would be "turning in their graves" at how our government has handled coronavirus response.

She also likened Australia's lockdown to "Nazi Germany".

As the great-granddaughter of an Anzac who fought in World War I, I find her claims disgusting and un-Australian.

The fact that Australia (93 deaths) and New Zealand (19

deaths) have managed to avoid mass loss of life is thanks to our Anzac spirit.

It is our ability as a nation to unite to make sacrifices and hunker down for the greater good and to keep the viral enemy at bay.

We would not be so lucky if we behaved like anti-vaxxers and prioritised selfishness while ignoring the safety of the vulnerable.

If coronavirus is "our war", as it has been described, anti-vaxxers are the traitors and defectors.

A coronavirus vaccine will be too late for Anthony and the many more who have died, but if it does arrive, here's hoping the anti-vaxxers get out of the way and let proven medicine save lives.



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Anthony Causi, a photographer who covered sport for the New York Post for 25 years, died last month from coronavirus. Picture: Christopher Pasatieri/AP