

# International mourning day of anesthesiology: year 2020 and Covid-19

## Introduction

October is a month of celebrations in medicine; the Nobel Prize in Medicine 2020 was given to Harvey J. Alter, Michael Houghton and Charles M. Rice who discovered the hepatitis C virus, the World Anaesthesia Day commemorates the first successful public demonstration of surgical anaesthesia on October 16, 1846, and in many countries the day of the doctor is commemorated on October 23; festivities that have been marred by the death of thousands of health workers around the world who day by day expose their lives attending patients with Covid-19.

In December 2019, the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in Wuhan, a city located in the Chinese province of Hubei.<sup>1</sup> On the eve of 2020, the WHO office in China was informed of cases of atypical pneumonia of unknown etiology. Three days later, the first 44 patients with this new pathology were notified.<sup>2</sup> On January 23, 2020 the central government of China imposed a lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei in an effort to quarantine the center of an outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19); this action is commonly referred to as the Wuhan lockdown.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the disease has spread rapidly to more than 215 countries and territories, becoming a pandemic that has produced until October 19, 2020 a terrifying figure of 40,246,655 confirmed cases, including 1,115,985 deaths,<sup>4</sup> with the American continent being the most affected geographic region with a total of 18,593,565 confirmed cases,<sup>5</sup> figures that increase dramatically with the recent global outbreaks of this pandemic. This topic is the most discussed and studied in decades. Undoubtedly, this pandemic has caused -in addition to a negative impact on health-, an individual, family, social, economic, and political catastrophe, which has generated countless problems and controversies that are difficult to solve.

Health personnel - doctors, nurses, technicians, chemists, laboratory workers, orderlies, among many other people who work in hospitals - have the right to work in safe places<sup>6-8</sup> a situation that is not happening in thousands of hospitals around the world, including in the so-called developed countries. This virus is easily transmitted, since the contagion mechanisms are very diverse and not entirely well known. The lack of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is the rule, a situation that has not been solved, causing frequent protests by the front-line healthcare workers.

Health personnel around the world have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2, infected or have died.<sup>9</sup> Although the data are difficult to confirm, at least 7,000 health workers affected by Covid-19 have died worldwide. In the American continent, some 570,000 health workers have been infected, of which 2,500 have died. In the USA there are 1,077, and in Brazil 634 deaths. Mexico and the United States of America have some of the highest case counts in the world, healthcare workers account for one in seven cases, and these two countries account for almost 85% of all Covid-19 deaths in American countries.<sup>5</sup>

In Mexico, from February to August 97,632 health workers have been infected with Covid-19, and 1,320 are dead.<sup>10</sup> The infection rate for the SARS-Cov-2 virus among health personnel is six times higher

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than in China and twice that in Italy; and our health personnel die five times more from Covid-19 than in the United States. It is the country that leads this shameful statistic.<sup>11</sup> Data obtained directly from the Federación Mexicana de Colegios de Anestesiología, AC reveal 60 infected anesthesiologists and 25 deaths from Covid-19 until October 2020. In addition to the routine lack of PPE, the very poor control of this pandemic by the government and health authorities, the high mortality rate from Covid-19 in Mexico could explain these unfortunate data.

It is known that a part of the infections and deaths by Covid-19 among health personnel is due to exposure to a high viral load for long periods of time, but it is also pointed out to the lack of protective supplies such as N95 face masks, isolation gowns, shields and goggles, lack of hospital infrastructure, shortages of medical supplies, in addition to poor and insufficient training so that health personnel know how to take care of themselves and prevent contagion. In addition to these negative factors, many politicians including presidents<sup>12,13</sup> and their peoples, behave as if SARS-CoV-2 is a minor flu, a temporary atypical pneumonia, an invented disease that is easy to control.

As the world applauds, honors, and exalts the health workers who have died from their patients affected by Covid-19,<sup>14</sup> in our country we are attacked, harassed, the judicial authorities detain us, and even assassinate us. An irrational phenomenon with no possible explanation. Why do some Mexicans attack doctors and nurses, even robbing hospitals dedicated to the care of Covid-19 patients? Mexico is the only country where this has been reported in the news, where a few compatriots believe that workers in the health sector are threats, vectors of transmission, risks to their communities. Fortunately, some politicians and groups in Mexican society have proposed to classify these actions as a federal crime and punish the aggressors of the personnel of the National Health System or for damage to its facilities.<sup>15,16</sup>

Other countries highly affected with deaths in their health sector workers are the United Kingdom with 649, Russia with 631 and India with 573.<sup>5</sup>

These data reveal that health workers - the first line of attack - are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19, which affects the workforce in the final control of this pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

Being an anesthesiologist in this time of the SARS-2 virus pandemic, Covid-19 means unsolved challenges, fear, fatigue, discouragement, improper quick decision-making, contagion and death. Our specialty-with a tradition of being high risk - has become a dangerous activity for each of us and consequently for our family and friends. The high possibility of contagion from Covid-19, the lack of PPE, and the irresponsibility of many health authorities and irrational politicians, together with the inappropriate behavior of the population, have turned this pandemic into a globalized cemetery for health workers, especially for those who labor in the so-called hospitals and sites adapted to receive patients with Covid-19.

This October 2020, we the anesthesiologists, have a mourning celebration of World Anesthesiology Day.

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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