

A SOLUTION ORIENTATED APPROACH



As we are moving through the last stages of the fourth wave of COVID-19, people are scrambling, once again, to return to some form of "normal". However, as experts observed, the Omicron-variant had spread at a rate that far exceeded any of the previous strains of the virus.

According to Professor Salim Abdool Karim, the Director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa, they have found that with each new wave, the rate at which infections increased was very similar to the rate at which it decreased again. Hence, the peak of the fourth wave was reached much faster and subsequently subsided faster as well.

Professor Glenda Gray, President and CEO of the South African Medical Research Council also remarked that the fourth wave had a defining characteristic. It consisted of a noticeable disconnect between cases, hospitalisations and death rates with the Omicron-variant being much more contagious but far less severe.

First-hand experience

This mirrors our claim experiences during the fourth wave, where we received a large number of temporary income protection claims from clients, which indicated that many people were infected with COVID-19. However, if we compare the number of COVID-19 related death claims to that of same period during 2021, when we were in the midst of the second wave, there was a definite decline in the number of death claims linked to the virus albeit that the claims are still higher than before the pandemic.

Therefore, although the Omicron-variant is much more contagious, the strain proved to be less severe. Also, we must not lose sight of the fact that our population has a higher immunity rate along with an increased vaccination rate, compared to last year.

More good news includes the predictions from experts, saying that although there will be more COVID-19 mutations in future, indicators point to future variants being less severe. According to Professor Jeffrey Mphahlele, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the North-West University, together with the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Vaccines, South Africa will probably experience more waves going forward, but there is a strong possibility that it would not be as severe as the first three waves.

Moving forward

If one reviews the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report, the report already suggested a global pandemic since 2006. Therefore, according to the latest report, which was published in January 2022, infectious diseases have moved up the ranks as one of the top societal risks on both metrics of likelihood to occur and the severe impact thereof.

Although infectious diseases are viewed as a severe risk over the next two years, it moves down the ranks in the long-term (five to ten years). This could signal greater confidence in the medical and scientific fraternities with regard to managing infectious diseases in future.

In saying this, vaccinations definitely played, and continue to play a key role in the attempt to reduce the COVID-19 related death rates around the world. According to Professor Francois Venter, from the Infectious Diseases division at the University of the Witwatersrand, the majority of people across the globe, who are admitted to hospitals due of the virus, are not vaccinated. During so-called waves of infections, this does have an indirect impact on medical facilities and the ability to care for patients with COVID-19 related complications, as well as those needing care for other illness. Preventing hospitalisations from COVID-19 should, therefore, remain a top priority for all of us.

The best possible defense

Dr. Angelique Coetzee, Chairperson of the South African Medical Association stated that, although vaccinations may not act as a preventative measure against COVID-19, the intensity of the symptoms differ between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. In light of the number of expert opinions regarding the positive outcome of vaccinations against COVID-19, I want to encourage clients and all South Africans to get their vaccinations as the best possible defense against this pandemic.



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