Our viewpoint

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GUIDED BY THE FACTS

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, South Africans have found their Anthony Fauci. It is to Dr Fauci that Americans, and indeed citizens of many other countries, turn for intelligible, unsensational advice. The role that the brainstorming sessions and the data he has used to shape government policy has been instrumental in the防控 crisis.

But Karim is without doubt the man of the moment. He is the chairperson of the Advisory Group on Broadening the Definition of Healthcare Workers, which consists of four ministerial advisory committees, including committees on public health and epidemiology. His task is to feed into the Covid-19 National Command Council, chaired by Ramaphosa, which is required to be the main advisory body to government.

On Monday evening, Karim led an extraordinary public briefing on the progress of the epidemic and the detailed steps government is following to deal with it. Transparency is without peer in a crisis. People hunger for information, and are equally desperate for authoritative sources of it.

It is not that Karim offered much cheer. He said the worst is yet to come, lockdown in some form is here to stay, and all we’ve done up to now is buy time the better to manage the deluge of cases down the road. But this served as a reassurance.

It is the new normal, which obviates so many of the unproductive, even destructive debates that proliferate without it. It is the essential guide through a bleak period. The business of politicians is to spin reality according to their interests. It is a relief to have experts present facts without ideological baggage, and Karim’s credibility will engender confidence in the very difficult steps government still has to implement.

Long may government continue with this unprecedented engagement with citizens.