

**A**t the time of writing this editorial, every news item and conversation seems to involve the coronavirus pandemic. It's hardly surprising, because a pandemic is something most of us have never experienced

and, in our health and safety-conscious culture, we are socially and mentally unprepared for something that has such potentially widespread risk to our freedom and wellbeing. Mass fatalities are something that happens to other people and societies, not us. Not here in our safe and sophisticated culture.

For me, and many others, the most unnerving thing is the speed with which the infection prevalence, and accompanying government advice, is changing. I know that by the time this edition of *The Biomedical Scientist* is published, we will be in a different and more threatening situation than we are at this moment. If the scientific modelling is correct, we are only three weeks behind Italy in terms of disease spread and impact, and life is about to change beyond all recognition for most people. It is beginning to dawn on everyone that this is an exceptional situation that will last way beyond a couple of weeks and whose effects will be felt for months, if not years.

As usual, I am irritated by negative and sensationalist reporting; the general public, and journalists in particular, seem to have a major problem in accepting scientific and medical advice and seem to

# THE EMERGING PANDEMIC



In times of panic and hysteria, we need to look at the evidence and listen to the scientists.

value the opinion of absolutely anyone over the scientific evidence of pandemic modelling. I wanted to applaud Jurgen Klopp who, when asked his opinion about the measures being taken to cancel sporting fixtures, responded: "I wear a baseball cap and have a bad shave. My opinion is really not important." I believe that the best advice will be based on scientific evidence but unfortunately the actual actions may well be based on a mixture of public pressure and hysteria. I'm just waiting for the snake oil peddler to come motoring into town.

Unfortunately, the consequence of the hysterical reporting and doomsday prophets is the emergence of hoards of selfish individuals, building their own personal bunkers out of toilet rolls and hand sanitiser bottles. Thankfully, they are more than matched by those who are

offering their services to help others more vulnerable in their communities and, as usual, our healthcare workers are rising to the challenge. I know the heroes will be the doctors and nurses but I'm hoping journalists will realise the massive contribution that our scientists are making to help in this unprecedented situation. What a contrast; the takers and the givers.

As a final thought, from the summit of my scientist's soap box, has anyone else noticed that all disaster movies start with a scientist being ignored?

**Sarah May**  
Deputy Chief Executive



Institute of Biomedical Science is the professional body for the biomedical science profession.

**INSTITUTE OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE**  
12 Coldbath Square  
London, EC1R 5HL  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0)20 7713 0214  
+44 (0)20 7837 9658  
Email: [mail@ibms.org](mailto:mail@ibms.org)  
Web: [www.ibms.org](http://www.ibms.org)

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Alan Wainwright CSci FIBMS

**EXECUTIVE HEAD OF MARKETING AND MEMBERSHIP**  
Lynda Rigby

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**  
[education@ibms.org](mailto:education@ibms.org)

**EXAMINATIONS**  
[examinations@ibms.org](mailto:examinations@ibms.org)

**MEMBERSHIP**  
[mc@ibms.org](mailto:mc@ibms.org)

**CHARTERED SCIENTIST**  
[chartered@ibms.org](mailto:chartered@ibms.org)

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