

With coronavirus, or COVID-19 as it has now been officially named, the headline feature of this edition of *the Biomedical Scientist* and the hot topic of most news bulletins, I feel it would be remiss of me not to offer some thoughts of my own on this subject.

My particular area of interest has been the construction of the massive care facilities (I can't quite bring myself to call them hospitals) erected by China in a matter of days to deal with the increasing number of people infected with the virus and requiring medical care or social isolation. Coupled with this is the plight of the passengers quarantined on a cruise ship in a Japanese dock, unable to leave, watching the number of infected passengers increase exponentially.

Both of those scenarios fill me with horror; the sight of endless rows of hospital beds in a structure reminiscent of an airplane hangar, and affording about as much privacy, is the stuff of nightmares. However, the parallel prospect of incarceration in a ship's cabin, albeit a "luxury" one with private washing facilities, would feel more like punishment than privilege after a couple of weeks without access to the outside world. Both are symbols of the loss, or restrictions, of freedom that have been implemented to control the spread of an outbreak. Living as we do in the UK in a primarily urban, or suburban,

SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN DEFENCES



Sarah May, IBMS Deputy Chief Executive, gives some of her thoughts on the coronavirus epidemic.

environment I do wonder how we would react if movement control measures had to be implemented.

The other image that has become for me the "trademark" of this outbreak is that of the surgical face mask. This puzzles me greatly as, in terms of protection from catching the virus, a tightly knitted scarf tied around the face, particularly if coupled with a nice balaclava, would be only marginally less effective. A face mask functions as a bacterial filtration barrier protecting the environment from the wearer, but in terms of protecting the wearer from a virus, it's rather less effective. Perhaps the problem is that the messages and images circulated via the media have far greater appeal and impact than the less sensationalist facts from scientist. It is for

this reason that I was so please to see the brilliant feature written by biomedical scientist Dr Sarah Pitt on COVID-19 was picked up by her local news station, leading to her being interviewed.

So, what scientifically proven defences will I employ if COVID-19 spreads in the UK? As a cold-handed individual I will continue with my trusted, but totally unscientific, defence against all the nasty bugs that daily assail the commuting public; a pair of woolly gloves.

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