Planning for the Pandemic

A Book Review of
PANDEMIC PLANNING. By J. Eric Dietz and David
R. Black. CRC Press, 2012. 330 pages. Ebook $ 9.57

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Since the novel coronavirus (COVID19) began spreading around the globe, many governments have been scrambling to mount an effective response to "flatten the curve." Countries such as the United States and Italy have been unable to control the spread of virus, accounting for 39.6% of worldwide deaths as of April 27th, 2020 (COVID-19), while other countries such as Taiwan and Australia are responsible for less than 0.1% of all deaths. Although these numbers are corrected by the population differences of the countries, the per capita death rates remain starkly different. A major factor in these differing results can be attributed to the contrast in how these countries approached the COVID-19 pandemic: a swift, coordinated, data-driven response was shown to be far more effective.

    Pandemic Planning begins with a classification of the commonly misused words outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic. By immediately defining the difference between these three relatively similar words, the authors set the tone for the rest of the book, alluding to the precise nature of pandemic planning.

    The book then continues onwards to reflect key points linking the rapid spread of any contagion with globalization. While it is easy to point to the numerous benefits of a now globalized world, our interconnectedness also makes us more vulnerable. Global travel allows for near real-time interaction with diverse populations, creating an environment where a single traveler could unknowingly infect thousands of people in the course of a single day. A highly contagious virus, such as COVID19, is capable of shutting down the global economy and thus, highlights the necessity to adopt war-time strategies in order to combat and mitigate the societal impact of any pandemics.

    One of the main ideas the authors enforce is the necessity for "classic military principles," as "[there is] difficulty [in] minimizing impact through mitigation [techniques]." (Dietz et al) Using a description of

classic military principles, they explicitly draw comparisons between fighting a pandemic and fighting a traditional enemy. *The Art of War* (TZU) and *On War* (Clausewitz) serve as the two main sources for this intricate analogy.

There are 5 overarching principles adopted from warfare: leadership, logistics, surveillance, simplicity, and objective. As defined by the authors, leadership revolves around making the pandemic response "rational and clear to the public," with a "single direction." This responsibility relies upon the command staff, or more specifically the Incident Commander. The Incident Commander, or the general of the army, "must manage the development of the response," and "lead a coordinated response." (Dietz et al) The authors additionally state that having experience in public health does not necessarily mean the leader is the most qualified – "different situations call for different commanders." (Dietz et al) In the United States, this position naturally falls upon the president. However, without the appropriate response there would be catastrophic implications.

Logistics are another important principle in the response to a pandemic. The authors state that logistics "[are] responsible for providing facilities, people, and supplies for a situation." (Dietz et al) Pandemics may lead to shortages in jobs, food, and health essentials, and planning for these contingencies is critical. When distribution companies are no longer able to transport goods, it becomes the government's responsibility to ensure that essential supplies continue to be produced and distributed. Without an organized plan of distribution of goods, mass panic ensues and there is unnecessary hoarding of sought-after goods.

The third principle is surveillance, or intelligence. A critical component of this principle is to obtain accurate data. In this modern era, a novel source of real-time data may come in the form of social media, and studies have shown "that tweets from Twitter provided a two-week earlier warning than relying on traditional surveillance." (Dietz et al) Importantly, these early warning data lose value as a function of time. Effective strategic adjustments often require early intervention, thus, highlighting the importance of transmitting data in a timely manner.

Finally, the last two principles mentioned (simplicity and objective) are interrelated as simplicity leads to the development of clear goals which in turn brings a sharp focus to the objective, ultimately leading to success. The authors state, "if there are two situations that lead to the same conclusion, the simpler of the two is to be chosen." (Dietz et al) The rationale behind this principle is that amid chaos, simplicity, objectivity, and effective communication provide stability.

In conclusion, Pandemic Planning emphasizes the importance of employing war-like strategies to combat various pandemics. Using intricate analogies, the authors successfully explain how the 5 principles of war apply to necessary pandemic fighting techniques. While COVID19 has exposed weaknesses within our current public health system, as well

as our government's ability to strategize, organize, and defend the country. Pandemic Planning offers a viable framework that should be utilized by leaders coordinating pandemic response efforts.

References

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