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Letter to the Editor

Political ideology and science in the pandemic era

Sir,

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the dissemination of the Sars-COV2 virus brought numerous challenges to human-kind. The effort of thousands of scientists around the world made it possible to develop vaccines that were the starting point for ending this agonising period. In this same scenario, unfortunately, the ideology of some political leaders, sometimes with traces of disbelief in science, might have influenced an effective response to the pandemic.

A lack of co-ordination among political leaders of wealthy nations is hampering the access to vaccines for Africa’s poorest countries, which may have contributed to the emergence of new variants. In Brazil, unproven COVID-19 treatments were encouraged by some politicians. Recently, an outbreak of itching in the state of Pernambuco might have been motivated by the massive use of ivermectin, which might have led to resistance against the pathogen *Sarcoptes scabiei*, known to cause scabies.\(^1\) Relying on the alleged efficacy propagated by government officials,\(^2\) some people took the medication independently.

In Brazil, some politicians minimised the harm caused by the virus and classified the pandemic as a conspiracy orchestrated by the media. The Brazilian head of state discouraged mask use among supporters on several occasions. In addition, 2020 was the electoral year for mayors and city councillors, which led to COVID-related restrictions being lifted by many parties. Political rallies took place without social distancing and sanitary protocols. Unproven statements about natural immunity against the coronavirus were also made.\(^3\)

On April 16, 2020, the Brazilian president fired the health minister due to disagreements regarding the response to the pandemic. In January 2021, hospitals in Manaus ran out of oxygen, and patients with COVID-19 died from asphyxia. The president constantly discouraged the population from getting the vaccine by saying phrases like ‘If you become a crocodile, it is your problem.’ Fortunately, as of December 2, 2021, Brazil ranks in fourth place worldwide in the number of vaccinations.

The current scenario led us to ask the following question: Does political ideology influence the belief in science? At the same time, we did not aim to answer this question with our brief comments. One of the great benefits of democracy is that it allows the debate and support for different ideologies, as long as they do not violate human rights. The provocative question raised others: What is the role of political leaders in situations of global chaos? Are the differences of opinion among politicians influencing an effective response to the pandemic?

Politics has two sides. One side is characterised by stability, predictability, and consensus that establishes rules for the harmonious coexistence of ideologies and powers. There is another one, marked by disturbances, dispute, and, above all, uncertainty.\(^4\) As part of the global community of oral and maxillofacial surgeons, we felt the need to express our point of view since we are also part of the worldwide community of healthcare professionals. We want to engage the surgical community to act as global citizens, strengthening our specialty.

Conflict of interest

We have no conflicts of interest.

Ethics statement/confirmation of patients permission

Not required.

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