
Considerations on my stay within the Red Zone

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Before addressing the issues that I want to write about, I must say that I have based my words on my personal experience within the red zone. My intention is not to present a perfect functioning in Cuba's Health System, I would be lying. But I will not emphasize on its flaws because they vanish when they are compared with its achievements. Hence, I will not magnify them as hypercritical people do, since they highlight these flaws over the achievements regarding the preservation of the health and life of our people ignoring the sacrifice of those responsible of such achievements.

The Cuban Health System is like The Sun, and when The Sun lights up and warms the Earth, contributing to life, its brightness clouds the any flaw.

I was informed on January 17th I had tested positive for Covid-19 and in the early hours of January 18th, I was taken to the Salvador Allende Hospital (*La Covadonga*). Upon arrival, two doctors examined me and did some blood tests, an X-rays to my lungs and an electrocardiogram. Everything was pretty fast. Afterwards, I was taken in an ambulance to a ward where I was admitted and stayed along with another sick patient.

No questions about my financial situation or health insurance were asked. Nor they requested any information about the possible expenditure.

Clean sheets and pajamas were given to me. I was briefed about the discipline I had to follow, which included the prohibition to leave the room. A doctor came and he was briefed about my symptoms. They gave me the first shot of Interferon along with *Diphenhydramine* as a precautionary measure to prevent any side effects. Then, I was told that others drugs — decided by a group of experts— would be added to the treatment after these experts assessed the results of tests previously done on me.

The Care

Every day, the nurse came and took my body temperature early in the morning. She would check my blood

pressure and provide me with the medicines. She would also warm the water with which we took our baths (one bathroom shared by the two patients). Few hours later, the doctors would come and do regular medical checkups. At night, the nurse would come again and provide us with medicines.

I was in the stroke room and the conditions were as follow: all plated in clean green tiles, a closet with aluminum inlay for each patient and the bathroom had a modern toilet with all of its accessories, and the sink was surrounded by grey marble.

Hygiene

The work of a fundamentally young personnel, responsible of this task, is characterized by their quality. They fulfilled their tasks daily with high responsibility and with no fear at all, they got in, did their job, and left with humbleness. I bear witness of their efforts and devotion. I think we must talk more about them.

Food

Breakfast: may be milk, yogurt, soft drink, fruit juice accompanied by bread. At mid-morning, a snack with the same components. **Lunch:** main course may be chicken, pig meat, boiled eggs, or any sort of cold meat accompanied by salad, rice, vegetable soup, and orange jam as a dessert. At mid-afternoon, another snack with same components as of those at mid-morning. **Dinner:** something similar to the lunch and another snack at night.

I do not believe anyone could demand that food at a hospital may boast the same quality as in a restaurant. The essence is, with this food, our nutrition was properly satisfied, as a specialist friend of mine explained to me later on.

The personnel and their behavior

I have no complaints. I was always treated well and taken care of. I am just grateful. No money can pay the sacrifice made by all health personnel.

I saw exhausted faces, but I did not see fear or despondency

I have given full details so people can have a more accurate idea on what this pandemic means for the Health System in Cuba, as well as its health personnel and consequently, the State. These experiences made me ask myself...

How much material, financial resources, and supplies are needed to maintain the logistic and operativeness of hospitals where Covid-19 patients are treated, or isolation facilities?

The numbers are certainly high. Not only are the costs of feeding in-patients, suspect patients and contacts—rounding more than 2,000—, besides health personnel taken into consideration, but also the medicines, transportation of infected people, as well as supplies, among other aspects.

Nonetheless, as I said, I was not asked about my health insurance. No fee with my hospital expenditures, to which might be added the costs of my transportation to take me to hospital or take me home, was delivered to me once I was discharge from hospital. Not to mention the follow-up care to me and my wife, or the PCR tests done to both of us, in my wife's case, to determine if she had gotten infected with the disease.

A female Spanish internet user wanted to know how much did the whole treatment cost me. And I answered back that I did not know because it was for free. She got surprise.

Some do not recognize this majestic effort the country is doing to save lives, and rather chase flaws.

About this sort of people, our Apostle would say: *“Some have only eyes for dark spots, and once they see beautiful things, angered by anything, they look for stains and flaws and enjoy when they find one—they are despicable souls.”*

It is true there are huge queues to buy staple items, but there are none to be admitted in a hospital or wait for health assistance, guaranteed for all Cubans without discrimination.

I find it important to repeat that neither inefficiency or corruption within the government have triggered the lack of supply and shortage we are facing. The main reason is the criminal economic, social and financial blockade imposed by the US against Cuba, which is regarded as an act of genocide.

In this context, prices have skyrocketed disproportionately in most cases. And the government is taking care of this reality, while fighting excessive and speculative prices, protecting those who can afford it the least.

But neither the rise of prices in the domestic market, or the global rise of prices of food, medicines, and supplies used in hospitals, have impacted negatively in the chances of any Cuban to have access to the health services of the nation. The service is for free, still amid this complex and tense economic situation our country is dealing with. The government prevents that any external factor may impact the access to free health care. And this is an added value perceivable in our salaries (now increased); that is to say, to our salary we must add every penny we do not have to pay to enjoy our medical assistance, not to mention the peace of mind that comes with it.

Health care in Cuba is not business, but a right

Let's remember that, millions of people worldwide cannot enjoy health care due to high prices, before the indifferent eyes of their governments. Fortunately, this Revolution, under the leadership of Fidel Castro, cared about creating a strong Health System to cover all people for free. This fact has helped us face successfully this pandemic.

Most of us, who have recovered from Covid-19 so far, would not be alive if not for the Revolution.

On the other hand, it is true that not all people sick with Covid-19 have been irresponsible or have violated sanitary measures and social distancing. But we cannot deny that irresponsible behaviors have had direct impact on this new outbreak.

Perhaps some may say that, long queues are among the reasons having direct impact in the negative effect of the pandemic, but not the queue by itself, but the sanitary directives breached in the queues, which have led to high rate of contagion.

Events occurred in state-owned institutions have also impacted negatively. And our leaders have critically addressed this situation.

But we cannot hold accountable the State for these events, as many of us, or our relatives, work in these institutions. So we are responsible for avoiding these unpleasant situations.

Let's us all think in our country, for the wellbeing of our country

To avoid any misunderstanding or manipulations, I am not accusing nor finger-pointing at anyone, of our own responsibility as individuals.

However:

How many more tons of food and staple items could have been bought with the financial resources already invested after these irresponsible conducts?

Not few, that is for sure. And I highlight this with the purpose to raise awareness. If we behave responsibly and comply with our duties, we will be certainly contributing with the improvement of the situation amid the pandemic, the country in general. That is to say, our own wellbeing.

We have a duty to preserve, develop, and defend the advantages of our social system from the enemy's evil purposes, which try hard to discredit them.

Let's take a look to the cruel realities prevailing across the world and we will have a much better understanding of their meaning.

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