

EADV News

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Albert Camus, Covid-19 and the Dermatologist

16th EADV Spring Symposium

CANCELLED

due to Covid-19 outbreak

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On 4 January 1960, Albert Camus, the famous French writer, died prematurely in a car accident on his way back to Paris. The Facel Vega sports car, driven by his friend Michel Gallimard, crashed into a tree at high speed, and Camus died immediately. His most famous novel published in 1947, *The Plague* (La Peste), is set during a plague epidemic in the city of Oran in Algeria.

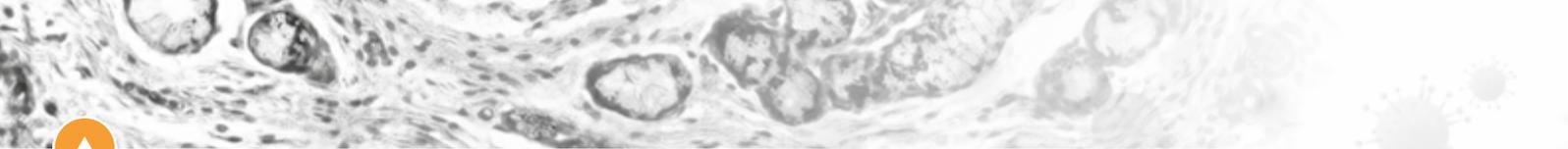
The book meticulously describes the life of the people during the epidemic and the different reactions the plague caused in a population forced to live in quarantine, isolated from the rest of the world. The narrative concentrates on the figure of Dr Rieux, a general practitioner who devoted all his time and energy to fighting against the disease. He was the first to attract the attention of the local authorities who initially navigated between incredulity and fear to alarming the public. He organised patient care and attracted other citizens around him to manage the epidemic. He expressed compassion and



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solidarity to the suffering of patients, representing Camus's view on what can be called an "ordinary hero." Around him, the different characters are described with realism and humanity: Cottard, who took the opportunity of the epidemic to make money on the black market; Father Paneloux, the preacher who took a moral stand viewing the plague as divine punishment for sinners; Rambert, the journalist who first tried to escape from the city and then accepted to join Rieux to take care of patients. When published just after World War II, *The Plague* was interpreted as an allegory of Nazism, but its symbolism is certainly broader than that. *The Plague* can be seen as a metaphor of human reaction, both at the individual and at the collective level, to an event that threatens life and society.

Since January 2020, the world has been facing a global pandemic of a new SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), commonly known as Covid-19, which is currently spreading to millions of humans worldwide. It is clear at the time of writing this editorial (March 2020) that no country is protected from the >



“ During such a painful experience we learn that there is in human nature more things to admire than to despise. ”

The Plague

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> pandemic and that the full resources of our societies need to be mobilised to manage the situation and to protect the most vulnerable and provide care to the patients affected.

Like the plague in Camus’s novel, the Covid pandemic profoundly disrupts our societies, our lives, and our interactions at both local and global levels. We see the same type of characters developing around us: healthcare providers and civil servants fighting against the disease and organising patient care, researchers implementing strategies to find weapons against the virus, crooks speculating on the price of face masks and alcohol-based solutions, politicians lacking courage and leadership, even thieves stealing material for disease prevention and treatment in hospitals. Every day we witness shining examples of solidarity between human beings as well as reactions of fear and rejection. As physicians and caregivers we need, like Dr Rieux, to actively engage in our communities to alleviate suffering and participate in the fight against the virus. Compassion and solidarity are needed more than ever now we are all facing the same danger together.

The EADV office and the leadership team are fully committed to protecting the safety of our community by reducing potential exposure to the virus and further transmission. We will follow local guidelines concerning our actions and consider, when required, virtual alternatives for our meetings and courses in the months to come. At the individual level we all need to contribute to patient care and provide information to the public regarding appropriate risk management strategies. Like the citizens of Oran in *The Plague*, we will ultimately overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. As Dr Rieux states at the end of *The Plague*, “during such a painful experience we learn that there is in human nature more things to admire than to despise.”

With my sincere wishes to all of you in this difficult moment, I am looking forward to the time when we can celebrate the end of this pandemic together. ●

Carle Paul MD PhD
EADV President (2018-2020)



Prof Carle Paul

