

Transcript of Interview with Craig Short, Eshan Doshi, and Taryn Ross by Each Other

Interviewee/Interviewer: Craig Short

Interviewee/Interviewer: Eshan Doshi

Interviewee/Interviewer: Taryn Ross

Date: 12/02/2020

Location (Interviewee/Interviewer):

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Abstract: This is the second installment of an interview between three college students taking a course on global pandemics. We ask each other about how our understanding of the current pandemic has changed as we learn more about past epidemic conditions, and assess how we could apply those lessons going forward.

Craig Short 0:01

All right, we're rolling. So.

Eshan Doshi 0:04

All right. I'm Eshan. And I give consent to this interview.

Taryn Ross 0:10

Hi, my name is Taryn. And I also give consent to the interview.

Craig Short 0:14

My name is Craig. And I also give consent to be interviewed for the archive. So today is December 2, 2020, and we're just going to do a quick interview about how our perceptions of the pandemic in general had been affected by taking a class on past pandemics. So I'm going to start off just by asking, how has learning all this historical context about so many different pandemics in different areas of the world, has learning all this made you feel better about the COVID-19 pandemic? Or made you feel worse, or, you know, something in between or something different?

Eshan Doshi 0:53

Yeah, so I think I feel definitely worse about our response to the pandemic, just because we've seen in previous pandemics, that, that there's aspects that we can learn upon. And it seems like we haven't taken the necessary steps to do that, and that's kind of disappointing. You know, like, for example, wearing masks and social distancing. We've kind of learned that from influenza, but like, it's not fully implemented in society today. So we definitely, there's- there's definitely aspects that we should have learned and taken steps towards improving, but we actually haven't.

Taryn Ross 1:32

I completely agree with that, Eshan. I think it is discouraging to see how we have repeated some of the mistakes that we have experienced in prior pandemics. Before this course, I really hadn't considered a situation where people have been faced with a pandemic in the past like we are right now. I do think in a slight way, it's reassuring to see that society has bounced back from pandemics in the past, whether or not it's been a productive response. I think that learning about

past pandemics has made me realize that we will get past this one as well, which is something I hadn't really considered before taking this course.

Craig Short 2:10

Definitely. Yeah. And yeah, I would just say like, in general, it's sad to see us falling for a lot of the same mistakes that humans have made over and over again. But I think at this point, we are definitely better poised than we've ever been to deal with it. So that's a good transition for Eshan to ask his question.

Eshan Doshi 2:27

So what would someone who lived during the influenza time, think about our response to COVID today?

Taryn Ross 2:36

I think they would be shocked to see a rather similar response a hundred years in the future. The masks would be something that they were very used to, and we see that parallel nowadays. We also read an article about an anti-mask group in San Francisco and I think they would also see similarities in society nowadays, as well. So I think as we mentioned earlier, it's kind of interesting and a little disheartening to see that the responses now are pretty spot on to the way that they acted over a hundred years ago.

Craig Short 3:11

Yeah, and I would agree. I mean, I think a lot of mistakes have repeated themselves. And so they see a lot of familiar things, especially with sort of opposition to state mandates in general. But I don't know, I think really what would surprise someone who lived through influenza is people's ability to deny that the pandemic exists, you know, because the influenza was just so ever present. Everybody knew somebody that had died in here, it's a little, little more possible this year to sort of live in a bubble and try to deny that it's happening and that there's like a government cover up. And I think like the nature of informational exchange has really changed since then. That's probably one of the biggest factors in how people have understood COVID versus how they would have flu, influenza. So yeah, it'd be sort of a mixture of recognition and just like, "What the heck are y'all doing?"

Eshan Doshi 4:05

Yeah, I think that's like a common trend or main takeaway from- from the question is that there's really no difference that we've taken steps to advance and- and, you know, with Taryn's question coming up about the increase in science, and we'll see if that actually makes a difference in our response.

Taryn Ross 4:25

Yeah, so I think that definitely, the similarities are kind of frightening if we saw headlines from the 1918 influenza outbreak, we could have assumed their headlines from nowadays. But that just leads me to wonder, do you guys think that the increased scientific knowledge we have now of the COVID-19 [audio cuts out] compared to people's knowledge from earlier outbreaks and pandemics? Do you think that that increased [unintelligible] really helped us in any of our responses, or just, how do you guys see that comparison?

Craig Short 4:56

Yeah, I mean, when you think about how a vaccine is about to come out, definitely, that's going to help. And I think in many ways, like, I don't know, our ability to treat people has improved vastly. Our ability to deal with, you know, an overwhelming amount of patients is certainly better than it was in 1918. We're still being overwhelmed. The medical field is really struggling right now. But I don't know, in ways that are much less serious, right? We talked about COVID being serious. And it is, but numbers wise, it's nowhere near really what influenza ended up being. So I think it has helped in that respect. But I think in another sense, there's sort of an over reliance in people's minds on how good medicine is. And I think that leads to people taking risks that they wouldn't, and that they shouldn't, with just sort of this assumption, you know, it's just the flu assuming that the flu is never going to kill anyone, but it does and it has and- and COVID is also killing people. So.

Eshan Doshi 5:57

Right, yeah, going off of that, I think, with the science and saying that kids aren't going to be, like, as- as likely to have, like, more long term damage and might not be spreading the disease and having effects from it. I think that scientific knowledge kind of stabbed us in the back because they could still be carriers, and they could still be spreading the disease. So in that sense, I think, yeah, science has definitely kind of hurt us there. But in other other ways, it's helped us from the Black- Black Plague, we've seen that they kind of the beak masks, and they don't really know why it's spreading and like, what the main causes and stuff like that. So now we do know. And you know, instead of wearing the beak mask, we wear masks and we social distance, hopefully. And so we do have more knowledge on that aspect. And so I think scientists helped and hurt us in certain ways.

Taryn Ross 6:54

Yeah, I'd agree with both of you. I think that some of the responses on a larger level, and the very recent findings of a vaccine that was done so quickly is definitely a positive outcome of scientific knowledge. However, I think that what I saw in previous pandemics we learned about with people's denial was a little more justified since they didn't really know what's going on. But I do find it frustrating personally, that people nowadays are still denying what has been proven as helpful and still going against regulations that have been put into place for the best at our society. So.

Craig Short 7:29

For sure. Cool. Yeah. So those- those are our questions that we prepared. Yeah, but I think just sort of as a final way to go out like, I know, it's interesting getting more context like this, because you think it really throw everything into clarity and be like, oh, you know, all this has happened before. But you know, every pandemic is new, every pandemic has new social conditions. So I don't know, it's useful to know about the past, but future is still a big unknown, right?

Taryn Ross 7:57

I agree with that completely. I also wonder, because I know, I didn't know any of this before coming into this course. And I've impressed some family and friends with the new knowledge and I'm curious how others would respond to increase knowledge of past pandemics, considering

a lot of people might just be living in the present and not really understand that this is a reflection of what we've gone through before. But as you mentioned, I think the future will really be telling after COVID-19.

Eshan Doshi 8:22

I... if people do know this knowledge, do you think they would like you know, learn from it? Hopefully they learn from it, but in the past, we haven't done that. So yeah, it's all up in the air and see what happens.

Taryn Ross 8:35

Yeah, we'd have to wait.

Craig Short 8:36

Fingers crossed.

Taryn Ross 8:37

Here's to 2021.

Eshan Doshi 8:38

Oh boy. Alrighty, I guess that does it. I'm gonna pause the recording.