

April 9, 2020

Dr. Doohan
501 Low Gap Road
Ukiah, Ca. 95482

I read, with alarm, the April 8, 2020 front-page article in the Ukiah Daily Journal. It quoted our Chief Public Health Officer as suggesting the shelter in place policy be extended until the end of May for our whole County.

I was and still am in full support of this policy for the month of April. I believe it to be crucial in our fight vs. COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate the spread in our County. This effort has been successful.

But there is, at this time, no verifiable justification to support its extension, in its current form, to the end of May. There is no data from illnesses seen in ambulatory clinics in our emergency room, in our hospital, or in patients to support predictions of a big surge, a small surge, or no surge to come. There is simply no data to support such guess work. If we did a more robust testing program last month and in the next 3 weeks to come, we may well have reliable data on which to base our intuition.

The attack rate in California has remained stable at 0.5 positive cases per one thousand in our population. That is 45 cases for our County with a population of 90,000. There may well be more underlying undetected cases. Even doubling that rate will only bring us to 90 cases in our County. Our task should be to find those cases, trace their contacts, and appropriately isolate them. We should not quarantine the remaining 90,000 individuals who are negative for the virus merely due to the failure to make an adequate effort to prioritize widespread testing.

We still have 3 weeks. I believe the data from California, our country, and the world will show significant improvement. There is no doubt that keeping the whole community shelter in place will continue to be helpful in combating the virus. But at some point, public health officials will need to shift their tunnel vision and take into consideration the damage being done to the businesses, economy, and daily lives of our community. Having to balance combating the virus with the collateral effects of government action will make your job more complicated. But it is time to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We need to come up with alternatives to prevent paralyzing the entire County. Real people are losing their livelihood; some are giving up hope and closing their businesses. We need to make an effort to minimize these irreversible harms.

The freedom to be critical carries with it an obligation to come up with solutions.

1. We need to prioritize mass testing, including urgently obtaining Abbott M-2000 machines for rapid POC testing. Then, we can isolate the positive cases and their contacts, and allow those testing negative to return to work and open up their

businesses. Current restrictive guidelines on testing were necessary when supplies were limited, but they will be a great hindrance in any effort to detect cases in our community. Plasma IgG tests will be even more helpful, but it will be a long time before we see it in the County.

2. For businesses to open, we can require negative testing, temperature monitoring, limiting the number of people in a room, and requiring some degree of social distancing. In other words, extend similar restrictions to non-essential businesses as we have for essential businesses. It will require much cooperation, but perhaps the community will find the extra effort worthwhile to start our collective road to recovery.
3. I am sure there are even better ideas out there if we start to solicit solutions from the relevant stakeholders.

I have cared for this community for 40 years. It is my hope that we can start the recovery process soon.

Sincerely,

Theron Chan, M.D.

cc: Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
Carmel Angelo, CEO