

Wellcome Genome Campus | OC4_2-17_Lessons_learned

[MUSIC PLAYING]

There are so many lessons that we learned during this pandemic. But again, because to us, the pandemic was basically a war where we all had to fight together. And what we learned, in our team, is that during wartime, you cannot think about personal growth. You cannot think about personal benefit or promotions. We have to think about the society, the country, the people around us.

So when we were sequencing, when we were collecting specimens or providing results to patients, it's extremely important to remember that our responsibility, as scientists, during a pandemic, during an outbreak, is just to serve.

Now, this is applicable to both groups. Applicable to the groups who generate the data doing the hard work in the laboratory. It is important that we share our data with people, with the world, so that the data can be used properly so that policies can be made based on the data.

It is also applicable for the people who are, perhaps not generating data, but looking at the data that is being generated. It is important for them to realise that people are working really hard around the world to generate that data, so when we use the data we must be responsible. We must think of the ethics and ensure proper credit is given to the people across the world who are working hard to generate the data. So I think of the many, many lessons, these are two of the very important lessons we have learned.

Well, I mean, in terms of lesson learned is that one is never prepared enough for what is the next thing to come because you don't know where it's coming from. You don't know when it's coming. And then we cannot be prepared enough, but then the lesson learned here, is that we need to be on top of our game.

We need to try as much as possible to build our capacity to respond to epidemics, but then the lesson learned is that if you don't have the resources or you don't have resources available, you cannot partake to this great initiative.

The best lesson that I learned through this pandemic, is that in Africa we are very overdependent from the outside on everything and then as such, Africa need to start really building, investing in what I call hard commodities, in order to ensure its own health security.

So it's very important because we over-relied and we are overdependent on the outside and that makes us very vulnerable. I think we need to change that narrative by start investing into production of diagnostics, therapeutic vaccines, and then also into all necessary commodities that could be used for public health response and laboratories.

I would perhaps give a message to other leaders and also to the students, is that the understanding of the fact that it's not too difficult to set up a new activity like this under a certain adversity. In fact, ours is a standout example as we did not have a single virologist in our Institute.

It's just a matter of having committed researchers, but as leaders, it is also important for us to stand with the researchers under such periods of adversity. at CDFD, the faculty, including me and a couple of others, we provided all external support to the staff who were actually doing the work, including local transportation, accommodation, providing them food or snacks, especially when they were working late at night. And this enabled them to perform these extraordinary tasks and helping them to keep their morale high always.

I learned that working together with other teams, other groups is the best option that we can do during a pandemic event like this that we faced. Because we can go further, we can produce more. We can share experience and improve together.

So I think during this pandemic working to perform some collaborations, establish some collaborations, and working together was a good lesson to learn during this pandemic.