
Editorial

COVID-19: THE MIDDLE GAME

In early January 2020, we all started to hear about an outbreak of acute respiratory illness in Wuhan City, China. Within weeks, we were preparing for a pandemic, which first reached Australia in late January 2020. By March, we were all dealing with the first wave of this new disease as Australians returned from overseas, many from international cruise ships. Six months on, we are in the middle game, as Victoria comes out of its second wave and New South Wales and Queensland get their outbreaks under control. Australia looks very different to even nine months ago—international borders are closed, interstate borders are tightly controlled and restrictions on movement, mixing and mass gatherings vary from relative normality in certain states to full lockdown in others. States of emergency abound, and the Australian Defence Force is assisting with everything from border controls and hotel quarantine, through to operational planning and the delivery of health services in a range of settings. As a Chief Health Officer for one of the jurisdictions, the response to the disease has been all-consuming. Consequently, I have had limited time to edit this journal and have been grateful for the deputy editor and associate editors stepping in and taking up the slack, including two excellent editorials.

In chess, the middle game is that portion of play between the opening and the endgame. Both players have completed their starting game, and the positioning of most of their pieces, and the king has been brought to relative safety. To use this analogy, we now have most of our pieces in place

for the identification, tracking, tracing and isolation of people with the virus. Broader societal measures are in place to prevent the introduction, seeding and spread of the virus, from quarantine and border controls to restrictions on behaviour and gatherings, and our state governments are moving to positions of relative safety. The middle game is also the time for preparing for the next stage, as we continue to build up our capacity and capability to react while we learn the hard lessons from around the world. We even have a reasonable concept of the what the endgame might look like—herd immunity of some type, ideally from an effective vaccine. However, the endgame is undoubtedly not as definitive as a checkmate, but hopefully less frustrating than a stalemate. Our moves during the middle game in the next 9–12 months will be critical in determining the ultimate success or not of the endgame. Military health practitioners will continue to have a critical role in supporting the next steps of the middle game.

Our third issue of 2020 contains a diverse range of articles from mental health and military medical training through to infectious disease and naval history. We continue to get a good range of articles. However, other military and veterans' health articles are always very welcome, and we would encourage all our readers to consider writing on their areas of military or veterans' health interest. We would particularly welcome papers based on our 2020 conference theme, but encourage any articles across the broader spectrum of military health.

Dr Andy Robertson, CSC, PSM
Commodore, RAN
Editor-in-Chief