

March 30, 2020

Dear ASP members,

The Fellows of the American Society of Pharmacognosy would like to reach out to all our members and offer a few optimistic thoughts in these dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic. First and foremost, be assured that we will overcome this setback to our world as well as any delays in our individual careers. But there will certainly be some delays, especially in light of the need for physical distancing, and that could be a cause for some anxiety. However, with our great new technology platforms (e.g. zoom, hangout, facetime, skype, etc.), we can still socialize online.

Nevertheless, we as Fellows of the ASP would like to urge all of our society members to respond to this event in the most positive way possible. First, we know that many members are involved in local compassionate community volunteer programs helping those most vulnerable to infection, as well as assisting health care workers in confronting a shortage of protective gear, and we encourage members to participate in this positive outreach.

Second, many of us are involved in some aspect of natural products drug discovery. Let us all make a commitment to staying up to date with the evolving literature on this virus, and applying our knowledge, insights and creativity to trying to come up with possible solutions. The genome is known, crystal structures are appearing for key enzymes, and a multitude of therapeutic or diagnostic approaches are possible. Who knows, but maybe there is a clue in the literature for a key insight to be made by one of us? This presents a unique opportunity for us to both highlight the proven potential of NPs as drug leads ([DOI:10.1021/acs.jnatprod.9b01285](https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jnatprod.9b01285)) and identify unsubstantiated health claims that start to appear in internet media (<https://regenexx.com/blog/coronavirus-episode-9-can-quercetin-help-covid-19/> and <https://twitter.com/bnbpositive/status/>; “*quercetin helps against coronavirus*”).

Third, there have been pandemics before, and human society has previously had to practice physical distancing in order to blunt their severity. Following WWI, the Spanish Flu killed somewhere around 40 million people, several times the number of deaths from WWI itself. Communities that practiced social distancing suffered much less morbidity and mortality than those that did not. And perhaps physical distancing has some positive aspects as well. As recently chronicled in the Washington Post (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/03/12/during-pandemic-isaac-newton-had-work-home-too-he-used-time-wisely/?fbclid=IwAR0uY5btL0zytI5KayvAemVXwKeFRcl4U97paXnciMEdAjhdF7xAiH8VPII>), Isaac Newton escaped London to the countryside during the London Plague of 1665. It was during this period of enforced solitude that he developed his theories concerning calculus and optics, and possibly even his early thoughts on gravity.

Universities are adapting to deal with closures as reported recently in C&EN News (<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODN/CEN/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=CEN%2F2020%2F03%2F23&entity=Ar00801&sk=A9E42ED1&mode=text>). Tenure clocks are being extended for early-career professors coping with delayed projects, and teaching assistants and research-funded students are continuing to be paid while teaching or working remotely. The ASP Fellows are happy to extend the offer to all ASP members of serving as senior mentors for any academic exchange that can help them overcome difficulties related to the COVID-19 crisis.

The Fellows thus urge our members to apply the knowledge, training and ability that we have all received in the natural product sciences, and to use this to deeply read and contemplate the scientific literature. A reading list is being compiled, including some of the most recent JNP articles that may serve as inspiration. And just possibly, some among us may contribute to solutions for the current situation, or make other profound discoveries or insights in our respective sub-disciplines.

Stay well!

The Fellows of the ASP

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John Clardy, Alice Clark, Geoffrey Cordell, Gordon Cragg, Phil Crews, Bill Fenical  
Heinz Floss, Bill Gerwick, Jim Gloer, Sid Hecht, Susan Horwitz, Chris Ireland  
Doug Kinghorn, David Kingston, KH Lee, Rachel Mata, James McAlpine  
James McChesney, Ted Molinski, Brad Moore, Susan Mooberry, Murray Munro  
Dave Newman, Satoshi Omura, Valerie Paul, Guido Pauli, G. Robert (Bob) Pettit  
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