

# COVID-19: rethinking seafarers' temporality to improve healthcare and prevention practices?

Richard Pougnet<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> , Laurence Pougnet<sup>3, 4</sup> , Pol Bleunven<sup>1</sup>, Ewen Jezequel<sup>3, 5</sup>,  
 David Lucas<sup>1, 3, 6</sup> , Brice Loddé<sup>1, 3, 6</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Occupational and Maritime Diseases Unit, Teaching Hospital Morvan, Brest, France

<sup>2</sup>Laboratoire d'Etude et de Recherches en sociologie (LABERS), EA 3149, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Victor Segalen, Université de Bretagne Occidentale, Brest, France

<sup>3</sup>Société Française de Médecine Maritime (French Society of Maritime Medicine), Faculté de Médecine et des Sciences de la Santé, Brest, France

<sup>4</sup>Military Hospital, Clermont-Tonnerre, Brest, France

<sup>5</sup>Emergency Unit, Teaching Hospital, Brest, France

<sup>6</sup>Optimisation des Régulations Physiologiques (ORPHY), EA 4324, Faculté des Sciences, Université de Bretagne Occidentale, Brest, France

Hitting the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic one year anniversary has been an opportunity, for many of us, to take stock and reflect. Ethical issues and management practices in maritime medicine have been re-examined in the light of this outbreak [1]. Throughout history, seafarers have been known to play a key role in the spread of infectious diseases, particularly amongst native American populations [2]. However, COVID-19 has not been primarily carried by ships, and many mariners and islanders have found themselves being rather isolated and spared from the outbreak.

Dr. Jezequel [3] reported this finding. He was working on a record regarding the French Southern Lands population's medical monitoring when the pandemic struck. Mariners and islanders from these circumpolar territories have been out of touch with the rest of the world, experiencing the pandemic through a different timeline, and facing considerable concerns on how to avoid the virus when travelling back to the mainland.

Temporality is a key concept in healthcare. It applies to each step of a healthcare approach: waiting for a diagnosis, for a cure, for the cure to show its effects...etc. Temporality can be asymmetrical and perceived differently depending on the person. While care-givers may often run out of time in their everyday practice, patients might be disrupted in their routine and face time differently [4].

How can this temporality concept apply to maritime medicine in the era of COVID-19? It might be a relevant

indicator in helping to comprehend how mariners or scientists have experienced this pandemic, in order to target preventive actions.

Remote marine personnel might not have the habit of following hygiene measures due to the fact that they have been isolated during a large part of pandemic. It is important to provide them with detailed information regarding their countries' national guidelines before they go back to the mainland.

Moreover, when confronted to the fact that a pandemic has been impacting their loved ones living far away, remote personnel may display distinct reactions. On the one hand, some could feel anxious because of they couldn't help their family. Indeed, feeling helpless has been shown to be a significant stress factor, leading to anxiety or mood disorders.

On the other hand, some could feel guilty of living in a COVID-19-free environment while their loved ones are exposed and threatened by the virus back in their hometown. Finally, it is worth mentioning that seafarers anticipating the fact that they have to come back to their hometown and be exposed to the pandemic may induce a particular form of post-traumatic stress disorder [5].

Some marines, on the contrary, experienced the epidemic on board, in a confined environment. They could develop anxious or post traumatic disorder after quarantine [6].

While mariners have often been described as disease carriers and spreaders throughout history, the COVID-19 pan-

✉ Dr. Richard Pougnet, MD, PhD (Philosophy), Centre de Pathologies Professionnelles et environnementales, CHRU Morvan, 2 av. Foch, 29200 Brest, France, e-mail: richard.pougnet@live.fr

demic has developed without them, or beside them. This new time lag between mariners and their loved ones could lead to mental health challenges such as guilt, or anxiety and mood disorders. Maritime doctors should acknowledge this issue, to improve detection and refine their health prevention advices.

## REFERENCES

1. Pougnet R, Pougnet L, Dewitte JD, et al. COVID-19 on cruise ships: preventive quarantine or abandonment of patients? *Int Marit Health*. 2020; 71(2): 147–148, doi: [10.5603/IMH.2020.0025](https://doi.org/10.5603/IMH.2020.0025), indexed in Pubmed: [32604459](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32604459/).
2. Thèves C, Crubézy E, Biagini P. History of smallpox and its spread in human populations. *Microbiol Spectr*. 2016; 4(4), doi: [10.1128/microbiolspec.PoH-0004-2014](https://doi.org/10.1128/microbiolspec.PoH-0004-2014), indexed in Pubmed: [27726788](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27726788/).
3. Jezequel E. Medical assistance to personnel outside the TAAF. Monthly review of the medical activity of the districts between August 2018 and July 2020. University Diploma in Maritime Medicine, option Embedded Medicine. University of Western Brittany, Brest, defended on 09/18/2020.
4. de Broca A. *Soigner aux rythmes du patient, les temporalités du soin au XXIe siècle*. Seli Arslan, Paris 2016.
5. Bridgland VME, Moeck EK, Green DM, et al. Why the COVID-19 pandemic is a traumatic stressor. *PLoS One*. 2021; 16(1): e0240146, doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0240146](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240146), indexed in Pubmed: [33428630](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33428630/).
6. Kang E, Lee SY, Kim MS, et al. The psychological burden of COVID-19 stigma: evaluation of the mental health of isolated mild condition COVID-19 patients. *J Korean Med Sci*. 2021; 36(3): e33, doi: [10.3346/jkms.2021.36.e33](https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2021.36.e33), indexed in Pubmed: [33463098](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33463098/).