

My Corona: Local Doctor Contracts the Disease

by Mitchell Kriegman

Being alone in self-quarantine, as many of us are to one degree or another, isn't easy. Being alone facing a raging coronavirus infection, even with loved ones nearby, is something everyone can't help contemplating or perhaps doing their best to avoid thinking about. It's a bridge we'll cross too, if we find ourselves there. Dr. **Richard Sibthorpe**, an affable Brit, longtime Santa Barbara resident and a highly lauded cosmetic doctor from the UK, contracted the virus and has crossed that bridge.

Pre-COVID, Dr. Sibthorpe proudly promoted the secret of his successful anti-aging cosmetic practice, "My mantra is to look good and feel fabulous." Obviously catching COVID-19 felt less than fabulous.

As hospitals max out with the direst cases, fighting to contain the virus within their own walls, home treatment in isolation will be an inevitable reality for many people. Dr. Sibthorpe prides himself, as many doctors, on his near invulnerability to illness. Doctors frequently feel omnipotent in the face of disease. That belief allows them to go into situations most of us would prefer to avoid. Doctors do, in fact, develop antibodies many of us do not, but clearly, they are not utterly immune.

The super efficiency of COVID-19's contagion makes isolation a central aspect of treatment. The valiant doctors, nurses, and hospital workers including janitors and administrators know too well the dangers of the extraordinary myriad ways the microscopic virus can infect inside a hospital. Disturbingly grocery clerks are finding themselves also on the front line, unprotected from the virus. Fomite transmission, the fact that the virus spreads contagion from inanimate surfaces, like cardboard, plastic, and metal doorknobs, is a formidable issue at home as well, as we unpack our groceries or receive packages delivered or ordered online.

Asymptomatic people who have contracted the disease "shed" the virus in the air while breathing, unaware they are infecting others. This is why we social

distance and wear masks. Without widespread testing, which despite government pronouncements is clearly not available, there is no way to be sure someone you know, or touch is asymptomatic. There is no tracking of actual active cases only projections and algorithmic modeling. In fact, there is no way to tell if *you* are contagious. These unknown variables are part of the swift deadly silent stealth infection we are dealing with and our inability to tame it.

When Dr. Sibthorpe checked in with the *Montecito Journal* on his twenty-fifth day of isolation, he was in good spirits and his voice sounded strong. Clearly, he was looking forward to telling his story. He arrived from the UK on March 11. Because of the news stories he had heard, he immediately isolated to protect his wife **Sheila Herman**, a realtor at Goodwin & Thyne. Shortly after, he developed the devastating fatigue, the first hallmark of the deadly coronavirus. On March 12, his wife insisted he go to Cottage Hospital to get tested.



Dr. Richard Sibthorpe

He Didn't Want to be Tested

"I wouldn't have gone to be frank," Dr. Sibthorpe remarked. "As a doctor I'm fairly stoic. I can only recall one infection in my eye and I'm sixty. I'm exposed to a lot of illness through my patients. Just generally, I don't seem to get ill. But I wanted to be safe for my wife."

He went with a mask and sat down in the ER but was sent away immediately and asked to sit on a bench outside.

"I was thinking I'd find myself sitting there for hours. It was a little weird because I wasn't feeling great," he remembers. But the staff came within ten minutes and took him inside and gave him a coronavirus nasal cotton swab test.

"In hindsight they had made the sensible move with other people in their waiting room," he admits. Overall, he was impressed with Cottage Hospital and how he was handled. Afterwards, he immediately went home, back into isolation. Still it would take a week to get results. But the coronavirus doesn't wait for test results. The next day he was so drained he couldn't move.

Treatment at Home in Isolation

"If I made any effort, I felt exhausted, I couldn't walk. Talking, even talking was impossible. My wife got a bit annoyed with me because she said, 'you don't communicate,' but I just felt absolutely drained."

By the next day he could not take a single deep breath and he had a tight pain in his chest and back and couldn't sleep because of that pain.

"I was literally gasping for air," he recalls, a horrific experience that reminded him of the time he was a teenager and suffered an acute asthma attack referred to as "status asthmaticus," so he already knew the anxiety and fear of finding it impossible to breathe.

"I just wanted to stay very still, very quiet. There were times during those days where I felt really bad," he recounts with typical British understatement. "I thought, this could be it."

He was still waiting on the test results, which by this point were immaterial. He knew from the clinical evidence he was experiencing that he had the coronavirus. The diagnosis was eventually confirmed. When he could, he thought about where he had been exposed.

"I tried to trace it back and I honestly can't," he says with astonishment. "I don't recall any of my patients being ill. I was with my children and other friends." The only thing he could remember was coming into the L.A. airport through immigration for his Green Card interview and sitting with sixty people in the room. There were no precautions even though it had already been declared a Worldwide Pandemic. The government's failure to take precautions, even after clear persistent warnings, has allowed many healthy individuals such as Dr. Sibthorpe to become infected that would not have been otherwise.

Dr. Sibthorpe's inability to peg the origin of contagion is what is called "community spread" which means that the source of infection is unknown.

One anomaly, in a disease rife with anomalies, is that his temperature was

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never very high.

"My temperature was 37, 38 centigrade but not into the forties (forties are the equivalent of 105 degrees Fahrenheit)," he added. "I'm from a different school about temperatures. Personally, I think it's the body's way of dealing with illness. High temperatures don't alarm me."

However, the next development was surreal.

"I completely lost all my smell and taste. It was very odd. I still don't have it," he added. This has become another frequent result of the virus attack on the trachea and lungs. Still the last thing he wanted to do was go to the hospital.

"What I've learned over forty years is avoid a hospital," the doctor remarked. "You might pick up something else while you're there. You know, if you're compromised and you need oxygen support, that's a different matter. But if you're able to look after yourself, have someone to take care of you at home, that's the best thing." So even when he felt he could barely breathe, he chose to stay home. As hospital beds fill up and patients are sent away, many of us may need to think through these same choices. Some of us may not have a choice and need to plan now how we will take care of ourselves in order to outlast the virus.

At home he took over the guest quarters and told his wife to stay out. "I'll be on the dirty side," he told her, "and you'll be in the healthy side of the house." His wife had to deal with heart-wrenching distress of not being able to take care of her husband directly. But in fact, she had to begin taking her own health seriously to stay safe, while also caring for her husband at a distance. They placed a table between the "dirty" and "healthy" sides where she would come with mask and gloves to give him food and leave.

Detox and Boost Your Immune System

There is no cure or prescribed treatment for coronavirus, so Dr. Sibthorpe couldn't fall back on his medical training. One significant aspect of the corona pandemic is that it's forced many of us look toward more traditional resources out of necessity with renewed focus.

What is the body's own biological way of staying healthy and fighting disease? Our bodies are not in fact helpless. Mankind has survived devastating diseases in the absence of miracle cures. In this pandemic moment, the old ways come to the fore. It's a signpost of this moment that more and more people are realizing the importance of basic health, essential treatments that date back to folk medicine.

"I was fortunate, that I've changed the way I think about things, so I was open," Dr. Sibthorpe remarked. "I don't go down the typical sort of empirical orthodox route all the time. There were certain things that I knew I should be doing. Things like mega-dosing with liposomal vitamin C, vitamin D and K combined, large doses of Zinc, and pro-biotics."

It was also opportune that celebrated local nutritionist, chef, and health coach **Veronica Villanueva** was a close friend they could turn to. She worked with both Richard and Sheila, detoxing and building up their immune systems simultaneously. Ms. Villanueva's book *The Grace of Cancer* recounts her personal journey to overcome Stage 4 lung cancer. She insisted that husband and wife adhere to the same regimen even though Sheila hadn't shown any symptoms.

Dr. Sibthorpe laid out the key points of his recovery program. First and fore-

most, bolster your immune system. This is our natural line of defense. This is not the time to undermine your natural defenses. Second, detox your gut. If the body must defend itself, nothing is more important than the microbiome. If you don't know about the microbiome and how much it determines your health, sleep, emotions, and well-being than you should Google it immediately. Third the old standby – fluids. Dr. Sibthorpe tried to get through a jug of water, about two liters, a day which was the bare minimum. Fourth, keep everyone else a safe social distance away. It's your responsibility no matter your condition. "The key cornerstone of the Hippocratic oath is do no harm," he points out.

Dr. Sibthorpe offered a few addition suggestions that included Biocidin, Cats Claw, mushrooms, celery juice, dandelion tea, elderberry, and perhaps the most ubiquitous resource in Santa Barbara County, CBD with a touch of THC. He also bought a Pulse Oximeter which measures the oxygen in your blood.

"I wanted to see my lung function absorbing oxygen, the saturation levels," he stated. Breathing, lungs, blood oxygen are a cornerstone of life. "If my levels were 94 to 96 that was fine. If I dropped below 90, then I would probably have needed support ventilation."

Recently many of us have become aware of how double-edged ventilation support can be. Many don't survive long-term mechanical intubation.

"Where we are now, is that I'm up and about," Dr. Sibthorpe reports. "We're about two weeks exactly. I got the pink ticket, you know, get out of jail, according to the CDC." That said it should be noted that he hasn't had a second test for COVID-19. Tests continue to be in short supply despite the outcry and misinformation. The current criteria as of this writing, is to not require a second clear test, even though the CDC advises people in recovery should have two negative tests to confirm they aren't contagious. Clearly meticulous control and tracking is not a part of our active protocol. That said life is in turnaround for Richard Sibthorpe.

I'm just sort of catching up with the news and it's almost like a paradigm shift," he muses. "We're all at home, we're not using all the fossil fuels and the planet is getting cleaner. We've learned that the social technology, which causes all sorts of isolation problems, actually, it's the best thing that we have at the moment to do this."

The doctor takes a moment lost in contemplation then reflects on his condition.

"For me, I'm coming back to eating. I obviously have a huge appetite. But I actually started to slow down my eating. I wanted to taste my food. My wife would give me a bit of chocolate and she said, 'that's all you've got.' If a slice of chocolate is all you've got, I tell you, you take a piece and you really suck that chocolate, you really make it last."



Health coach Veronica Villanueva, author of *The Grace of Cancer*



Sheila Herman with her husband Dr. Richard Sibthorpe 9 months ago in Montecito

PETER HARTMANN, DDS

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