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## The francophone front line and the covid crisis 19

*"It always seems impossible until it's done"*  
Nelson Mandela

The word "crisis" in Chinese is described by two ideograms meaning "danger" and "crisis", "opportunity". While we easily perceived the notion of danger through the COVID-19 crisis, that of opportunity seems less obvious at first glance. Like the god Janus, the COVID-19 crisis has two sides, both of which are often publicized in the media.

Probably the most visible aspect for caregivers is the unparalleled tension in healthcare systems worldwide. Images of patients dying in corridors bear witness to this tension which, like the disease itself, can be described as emergent. Even as hospitals were overflowing, doctors' surgeries were deserted. In France, this imbroglio was even organized by the State, with an initial recommendation to patients to stop consulting the first line... The state subsequently reversed the trend. Was there a real awareness of the risk of neglecting chronic disease prevention and care? Nothing is less certain, and it was perhaps simply a response to appease the professionals who had expressed their astonishment and discontent. It's not certain that the State has understood the notion of syndemia and its interweaving of biological and environmental factors<sup>1</sup>. It's not certain that the State has understood the importance of front-line, preventive care and chronic disease management, taking social inequalities into account. And yet, intensive care units are overflowing with patients with chronic diseases, whose social gradient is glaringly obvious... A strong front line could therefore modify the impact of an emerging infectious disease. Danger or opportunity for the healthcare system?

The other side of the coin is probably the crisis of knowledge. The usefulness of masks, the saga of hydroxychloroquine, vaccine hesitation, the effectiveness of community screening<sup>2</sup>, gains in functions and scientific controversies have all occupied television screens and minds. How did the front line, general practitioners, live with this infodemic brouhaha<sup>3</sup>? How did they deal with the uncertainty inherent to their profession, but exacerbated by the context of crisis? Despite all the uncertainties surrounding all this knowledge, how can we fail to welcome the rapid sequencing of the virus and the rapid development of vaccines? The front line has been involved in research, testing drugs before the cytokine storm. It has also ensured its didactic transposition to patients, explaining the rapid development of vaccines and their benefit/risk balance. Danger or opportunity for knowledge?

Faced with all these questions, a small group of front-line doctors have given evidence, reflected, and are still reflecting on the two sides of the word "crisis". In *Exercising*, you'll find a summary of their reflections by country (Belgium, Canada, France, Switzerland) and, to take things a step further, the minutes of a symposium on the subject held in Lausanne in September 2022, published in the *Swiss Medical Journal*<sup>4</sup>. All this work is just the beginning of the thinking of the French-speaking front line, since the god Janus looks both towards danger and opportunity, towards the past and the future.

### Références

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