

Primary Care Cures

Episode 137: Gigi Foster

Ron Barshop:

Welcome to the only show dedicated to a new way of delivering healthcare. This new model has no name, but let's go ahead and call it direct contracting or digital first care. The new way centers on opting out of the games bigs play with their rigged dice, their crooked game board and their purchased referees. And if you're looking for a future where everyone wins, that's the doc, the consumer, the employer, and with assured amazing outcomes and measurably lower costs that are ranging up to 60%, you're in the right place. I'm Ron Barshop, your host. I'm glad you're here. Welcome to the new healthcare economy.

Ron Barshop:

Listening knows I don't do deep academic dives into subjects that we all care about in matters of fixing healthcare, nor am I a journalist. But today's guest is a respected award-winning deep dive economist and a master educator first with a national journalistic platform in the Land Down Under, land of Crocodile Dundee.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. I'm going to set her up now. So first let's take this out at a 20,000 foot view. Ask any life insurance actuary, and they will max out a human life value at 15 to 20 times earning. So let me give you a few example. They may give you 20 years at that 50,000 and say, "You can buy a million dollars of life insurance" 20 times 50. If you're 40 and you're making 100,000, they may say, "We're going to give you that 100,000 for 15 years." So that's a million and five in life insurance will sell you. Because that's the human life value in their opinion. It's more complicated than that, but I'm giving you an idea.

Ron Barshop:

If you're 60 years old and you're making 300,000, they may say, "We're going to give you 10 years of human life value. So we're going to give you 10 times 300 or \$3 million." So that gives you an idea how life insurance actuaries, course oversimplified, look at human life value. Now, let's talk about personal entry attorneys because they deal with it every day, especially with a wrongful death. They regularly will settle a wrongful death lawsuit in the \$1 to \$4 million range. You just heard me give you three numbers. That's \$1 to \$4 million range.

Ron Barshop:

But what is the human life value lawsuit if it's the head of Goldman Sachs that got killed? That's not one to four million. What if it's Tom Hanks or Tom Brady? That's a lot more than one to four million, because they have a lot higher human life value because their earnings are much higher. It's not only a function of age and earning potential, but not in a second, in your earning history.

Ron Barshop:

So we all have a real mathematical life value to juries, judges and actuaries. It's science, it's heartless, it's math, it's data, because they are heartless. A newborn from a Rhodes scholar that was just born as I speak. And she's a Rhodes scholar mom, and the dad's a Fulbright scholar, they have a human life value for their child that's dramatically higher than the woman cleaning their house. If that child is brimming with a potential and becomes a Sotomayor, she becomes Sonia Sotomayor, or LeBron James. And you may not like hearing this, but that child doesn't have the same human life value as the other child.

Ron Barshop:

This is data. This is not my opinion. Economists like our guest, they are all about data. Economics is science. This becomes important because what is the cost of lockdowns and human life value? We've costed ourselves an estimated \$16 trillion to lose 666,000 as of today's count. So we're in mid-September right now. Or that's \$25 million for life, not one to four million that it's worth 25 million. So to say it another way, would you invest \$25 in your business to save a dollar or to save \$4? That's what we're talking about

Ron Barshop:

How do they come up with this crazy 16 trillion number? It's not easy. Let's talk about 50 years and socialization. There's a long term cost to this per kiddo in earnings and happiness. It's measurable math. And data, again, when you discount that long term cost to its present value today. So what missing school or socialization costs? This is math, is actually ECO 102. You don't learn it the first year. You may learn it the second year. Another cost easier to understand for all of us is, those of us who have gotten hammered. My company's nowhere near the size it was two years ago.

Ron Barshop:

Entrepreneurs have gotten hammered these past 18 months, independent retailers, pub owners, and restaurantors are the obvious ones, and those listing who are doctors that are independents, you get it. And hoteliers and landlords and entrepreneurs generally have lost life savings or have gone into deep PPP debt or have been forced to sell at steep discounts, at a rate of sales and medicine like we've not seen before. It's almost a 5X on what normal sales go for of medical practices. So we've seen a quintupling there. Or if you're any entrepreneur and you had to close your shop, you have a much larger, deep pocketed corporations who have not had to close shop because they could last through this.

Ron Barshop:

And the list of giant bankruptcies this pandemic triggered would be an hour long show by just listed all the companies. Maybe you've even heard of that could be a half hour show, but our economic recovery is going to take decades, not a V curve like they all say. It's going to take decades to rebuild. And there's a serious and measurable cost here too. This is all part of this human life value, 16 trillion I'm talking about. Here's another big one that's measurable poverty gains. We've made enormous green gains in poverty. We've built a middle class in America and up to 2020, we've made enormous poverty gains and we've built a middle class in America. And up to 2020, we have now officially been set back decades. A 15% more people are on Medicaid

than we're on this time a year and a half ago. Normally you'll see a 1% to 2% or 3% gain in Medicaid in bad times, not 15%. This is a very real cost to stack up.

Ron Barshop:

Five or 10 years of need all lumped into the past 18 months of federal treasure to support the vast social network way beyond Medicaid, because there's food assistance with snap, there's housing assistance, there's rent free, there's welfare, just hanging out cash. And there's dozens of safety nets that we haven't even heard of. And that's easier math too to calculate. Here's another one, delayed and deferred tests and treatment for heart and cancer related have accelerated deaths at home. That's a cost. That simply can't be found in some parts of the south. There was two stories yesterday about 40 phone calls to hospitals couldn't find a bed for a heart patient. No one wants to go to a hospital today if you can get a bed, anyway. The system is broken in regions with short staffing period.

Ron Barshop:

There's a lost human life value there too. And a future cost with delayed care, especially in cancer and heart and mental health, that's almost incalculable. We've never seen anything like this. And let's talk about mental health while we're on the subject. Abuse and domestic violence addiction all are related to mental health and it all adds to the cost for life lost to COVID. So I've laid out in this order, kids, small and medium business owners and some big companies too. The new wave of four, chronic care delayed and mental health in America. There's a bunch more, but those are the big ones.

Ron Barshop:

Now America's 330 million of us, but open up the lens aperture to the world's 7.9 billion souls. And we have billions affected who have lost big time in treasure, freedom, health, mental, and physical. And in more fragile economies than our resilient one, millions are literally starving to death. It's a hidden tragedy we're going to talk about with today's guest. And they're dying from preventable causes and thrown into disease and poverty, from middle class to poverty. We're talking millions, if not billions of souls, all because of badly considered policies and worse considered science that ignores best practices, that ignores data, that has, instead of crowdsourcing answers, they're single sourcing answers that prove to be moving the dial. We know crowdsourcing moves the dial. That's called the Bantien method. We talked a lot about it.

Ron Barshop:

[inaudible 00:07:27] clearly have gotten also drunk with power, which contributes to this. And they've dug their heels in on these dumb positions to look effective to us, not to be effective, to look effective, because they weren't effective in saving life, and we're going to prove it today. If you remember, prime directive one was, let's flatten the curve. Prime directive one somehow got in the trash sheet because prime directive number two, and we never talk about flattening the curve anymore, is let's eliminate the virus. What happened to prime directive one? Well, guess what, you can't do either of them because if you own pets, you really can't do those two. I learned reading this new book, our guest wrote. Because Rover and Fido carry Corona. You can vax your entire family. You can vax buddy and Rocky, your pet golden doodles, but they go to the super spreader party at the dogie part. And they're lick mouse and noses and butts and oh my

God, the aerosols are flying everywhere. Dogs get the same virus too the same way. Nobody's talking about this.

Ron Barshop:

Our guest will, because a few countries actually got their COVID response right. No, not just Sweden. There's countries way better than Sweden, way. So most to the health policy, APPIC has ignored the economic science that US life is worth one to four million, not \$20 to \$60 million that lockdowns have caused us. It's actually impossible to calculate accurately because there's so many unknowns, but every country is different. Maybe in Cambodia, for example, it's not a one to four million human life value. It's going to be less than a wrongful death. In North Korea, it may be near to zero because sadly it's leaders don't seem to value life at all. And they've been in a lockdown state for decades, losing people to starvation daily.

Ron Barshop:

Here's the point. These measurables; kid setbacks, entrepreneurial wealth loss, health delayed setback, or needless premature deaths because of that, poverty's burden to a national treasury. I'll have a contribution to the cost for death way beyond human life value. Yes, every life is precious. That's a feeling. But that's not data. We're here to support data in today's talk. And a pandemic response should be at least all about data. It's not mostly about data, and it has not been in America, UK, Canada, the EU, and even Australia where today's guest lives. We got this way wrong measurably. And weirdly we all went along, merrily down the past. If you look at Pew Research polls, three, four of us are very happy that we're doing what we're doing completely asleep.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. Back to data. If each death is costing us \$20 to \$60 million, not one to four million with any business and invest 20 to 60 bucks to save to one to four bucks. I have to ask the question twice because it's an important question. So that's granny you're talking about, Ron. That's your heart talking when you throw that at me. We're not talking heart today. We're talking data. Emotion is another subject for another show. Let's separate the twos please for just a half an hour.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. Back to 20,000 feet. This virus targets mostly the elderly and the elderly and a wrongful death lawsuit, sadly is a lower value than a peak earner. The data from a PI lawyer, not Ron Barshop. I'm not throwing my ideas out here. So the Spanish flu 102 years ago was really different from this pandemic because it took out 50 million, mostly peak earners aged 20 to 40. That was that virus. This virus is different. My great-grandfather Sam Barshop died in the flu epidemic of 1919 and 1920. We lost him and the infant, Dorothy, their baby to that one. So my grandfather, Joe had to drop out of school in eighth grade and support a family of five by himself. Now that happened saying the pandemic today, just a lot less statistically, because this is a pandemic of silver hairs. So a different and yes, lower human life value for this pandemic. Heartless, no, economic, science, data. Sorry to keep hammering you on this, but don't get soft on me now. You're almost there.

Ron Barshop:

Today's guest has been called a granny killer. In fact, every bad word you can imagine that they have in Australia some you've never heard of. She's had death threats because she talks about the science of human life value. And it sounds heartless sometimes because math is heartless. But country's reactions to the pandemic have three flavors says today's guests, which have radically different costs per death. Because we're interested in the few that got this lockdown calculus. What can we learn from Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, for example. She calls them minimalist or pragmatists in her book. They're in a club almost done by themselves with a few other countries. Maybe I've never heard of, but they lock down very lightly and yes, Sweden's on the list too, but they lock down lightly. The deaths per million, which is a really clear way to understand how well they did over 18 months was in the tens.

Ron Barshop:

So I'm going to throw some numbers, which is hard to do in listening. But 34 died per million in Taiwan, 41 in South Korea, 120 in Japan. So in the tens. Let's talk about the rest of the world because it's scary compared to 34, 41 and 120. In Canada, we had hundreds of deaths, 705 per million. UK 1,932 deaths per million. Us about the same 1,830. So 10 to 50 times the number of deaths that the three countries I mentioned earlier, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, that had light lockdowns versus our much more heavier austere shut down everything including schools. English speaking countries didn't do so hot nor did EU with stringent lockdowns. Why are our deaths per million way worse than those other three? Our guests is going to answer that today.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. It's mostly attributable to bad policy, ignoring boring, but reasonable science versus headline grabbing sensationalized science and data. It's about feds living in their new power while quietly cheerleading the big businesses like Pharma and big media that drove the scare narrative. And it's all about filling their corporate treasuries because boy did they do good? And that's all detailed in the book. And the crowd we all went along, gleefully singing a song, whistling a happy song as we most had lost in every way possible while the big won, especially in American healthcare, big systems, big pharma, big private equity firms did very, very well.

Ron Barshop:

I am so excited to introduce you to today's guest. A little bit of long bio, but it's worth it. Gigi Foster is an American educator living in Sydney, not an American in Paris, an American in Sydney. She has 14 years in Down Under. We can all be proud of her because she's done well. She's a professor of School of Economics at the University of New South Wales. She was educated at Yale in ethics, politics and economics. And she also got a PhD in the University of Maryland in economics. And she works in a super interesting diverse set of fields that are perfect for this pandemic, including education, social influence of crowds, corruption, lab experiments, time use, behavioral economics and Australian policy. So really interesting mix there.

Ron Barshop:

And you may not know Australia took a really sad turn this pandemic with freedom and liberty's almost disappearing in any state politics, replacing those freedoms. That's another topic. Another show. Her research contributions regularly inform public debates and appear in both specialized

and cross disciplinary outlets. And her teaching featuring strategic innovation and integration with research was awarded a 2017 Australian Award for University Teaching. So she got a citation throughout the standing contributions to student learning. So she's a master teacher and in 2019, she was named the young economist of the year by the Economic Society of Australia. Not too shabby. And she has a national journalistic platform co-hosting The Economist, which is a nationally broadcast economics talk radio program and podcast known as Fifth Season. And she, how I found her, is the co-author with two other partners of Covid and the Madness of Crowds, What Happened, Why, and What To Do Next. Gigi Foster, welcome to the show.

Gigi Foster:

Thank you very much, Ron. It's a very kind introduction.

Ron Barshop:

Well what did I miss Gigi? I tried to cover the highlights of the book. What did I miss and what would you like to comment on before we get started?

Gigi Foster:

You did really well. The title of the book is slightly different, The Great Covid Panic: What Happened, Why, and What To Do Next. But it's funny because everybody seems to get the first part of the title wrong. I don't know why, when I did these interviews. But look, you covered very well the chapter that we have, which is chapter five on the tragedy that has been visited upon us by the policies that have been put in place, particularly by, as you say, the more crazed countries, we call them the COVID cult countries, around the world that have really gone hard with these lockdowns and associated restrictions of freedoms. I guess one of the things about the book that people seem to like when they read it, that you didn't mention, is that we try to make it very relatable to readers by telling individual stories through the eyes of what we see as the three main archetypal characters that have really played important roles during this period in getting the madness started and in keeping it going.

Gigi Foster:

So we start the book off by talking about our first archetypal character Jane, who is basically just a standard citizen who is nervous and gets scared of COVID after having been exposed to so much media that was swirling around in late February and then early March. And gradually starts to give into that fear and to push her politicians to protect her from this new threat. And she doesn't look up the data for herself. She doesn't try to keep perspective herself and she ends up being manipulated by her own fear. And she's a big part of how we get into this problem in the first place. And indeed later she is part of what keeps it going because she becomes basically a vigilante and the Karens who go around and scold people on the street for not wearing their masks or having a party or doing other normal human things. So she was a big part of what was going on. And she still is. Here in Australia there's plenty of Janes still hanging around at all sorts of places.

Gigi Foster:

The second character is James, and James is an opportunist. So he's not a scaredy cat. He likes to think he keeps his head in difficult times. And what he starts off doing in this crisis is wondering,

what can I do in order to preserve my status and not lose my seat? So James is in government. James is at the top of companies. James is any place where there's an opportunity to potentially benefit from what's happening, but he doesn't necessarily start out thinking he's going to exploit the world or his country or his region. But he ends up basically being seduced by the opportunities that COVID presents to do that. So in government, he starts to who impose these lockdown restrictions and other kinds of extreme measures. And he gets rewarded for it.

Gigi Foster:

Here in Australia, our State of Western Australia gave to a landslide, the party that had basically put everybody into lockdown a reelection. and everyone looked at that post slides of politics and I thought, Well, I guess it works. If you deliver a lockdown, people seem to think that you're great, because you've been seen to protect them from this virus. So that's a James in government. James in companies jumped on the bandwagon to be able to be seen to provide for what the governments were saying was needed. So that could be personal protective equipment or hand sanitizer or vaccines or whatever else, while making a big buck. And so there was this very, very strong exploitative component that continues even today. Many government contracts were handed out to all sorts of people who got really rich and are increasingly going to attempt to fade into the background as this madness fades out because otherwise they are the ones really who should be brought to justice.

Ron Barshop:

My favorite character though is your third one. And I think if we had to do the math, I actually have some data for you. Pew Research does studies on James and Jane because that's about three out of four Americans that believe that everything they're reading, they're they do quite question, but not much. And they just are going along because they want to get along. Now red and blue divides completely differently if you are a Republican or you lean right, you tend to not believe the government, you tend to be this third character you're describing who I think is you and it's me. So let's talk about the third character now.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. So the third character is probably you and me and my co-authors. And I like to think maybe somewhere between 10 and 30% of the people in any given country. It'll vary by country, of course, but her name is Jasmine in the book and she is essentially the skeptic. She's the doubter. She's the one who likes to think for herself. And she doesn't get swept along with big crowd obsessions the way that a lot of her neighbors do. And she, even before COVID, often found herself disagreeing with most of the world about stuff, about important things, religion and politics and science, and she just had her own view. And so when COVID started coming onto the radar in March, Jasmine looked at this new threat and saw what everybody was doing and thought, well, this is not commensurate with the threat.

Gigi Foster:

These behaviors people are taking and the fear that I see, it's not commensurate, it's disproportionate to the actual variance of this new bug and the actual threat it poses to our people. And in fact, we should be taking a very different policy response. So back in March 2020, I went onto my national radio program and said, "We should not be locking down the

whole society. We should targeting our protection to people who are actually vulnerable to this virus." And that was, I think Jasmine's position generally speaking, take practical action. Don't overreact. And we were expecting that this whole thing would blow over within a couple of months. I don't know about Ron, but I was definitely expecting that in March and April of last year. And I was just horrified to see how long it continued after that.

Gigi Foster:

And that was part of what made me and my other Jasmine co-authors decide we had to write this book because we could see that this was a phenomenon that was historical. It was foundational. It was unignorable. We had to pen our view of what had happened. And we had to understand the continuation of the madness in a social scientific context. That's why we brought in this concept of crowds. And you mentioned this briefly in your intro, but crowds and the notion of going along with the herd crowd psychology, it's something that social science really doesn't deal with much in our [crosstalk 00:22:31].

Ron Barshop:

I want to talk about that. That's the core of my question for you tonight. But let me reframe your book in a little different way than you did. Because the way you describe your book is really very nice. You say, well, we're like baking a cake. So let me get these names right.

Gigi Foster:

Frijters.

Ron Barshop:

Paul Frijters had recipe. You Gigi assembled the ingredients and Michael Baker appropriately baked the cake.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. Baked the cake.

Ron Barshop:

So that's a proposal, because I suggest this is not a baking of a cake this is a giant crime scene of epic proportions and the three people you just name are actually witnesses and accessories to the crime and they're also the victim at the same time, which makes it the perfect crime. So if you come along with me on this little journey and tell me if I'm on target here. I see basically this is the greatest crime in history and it's not just a murdering mystery of millions. It's an epic con job on billions and the theft of trillions. Does that make sense to you?

Gigi Foster:

Yep. I basically completely agree.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. So we're on the same point that this is an epic, massive historic power grab and an epic, massive crime actually perpetrated by very nice honest people for the most part. And the power

grab is by the point of regulate. So let me reframe all the players in your book as a crime scene. Okay?

Gigi Foster:

Yeah.

Ron Barshop:

We have three perps. The first perp is the obvious big winners. These are the big money cartel and big money mafia. I'm going to call them big money. What do you have to say about the big money who are giant winners in this game?

Gigi Foster:

Oh, look, this is from an economist perspective. One of the most obvious losses is that big business has crowded out little business during this period and the concentration in various industries that was already increasing in a bad, in an alarming way before COVID has gotten that much worse. So everyone now is dependent on Amazon, for example, and you YouTube and these other big companies that they're stratospherically large compared to what we've seen in history. And they crowd out the little guy, partly by using COVID as an excuse. The little mom-and-pop bakeries and restaurants and whatnot, have a lot harder time coping with all of the COVID restrictions and the passes, and the check your this and that. And do you have a mask and all that sort of stuff. Then a larger chain does because the larger chain just has more of a profit margin. They just are able to withstand and get through difficult periods.

Gigi Foster:

And so that's why we're seeing a lot of bankruptcies. And of course, as an economist you know that in increased concentration, which means decreased competition is bad for human welfare. It's bad for the consumer. When you don't have choice, you can't run away.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. Well, you actually detail in one chapter, the P&L effect on big social media and on big healthcare. And it's amazing. The numbers are just in a hundreds of billions. In primary of care, what we've seen is, the normal amount of primary care businesses that are independents that are purchased in a normal time is about one fourth to one fifth of what it's been this past 18 months, because the hospital's got a basically free Marshall Plan of 175 billion, which is more than the actual Marshall Plan that got its world peace after World War II to buy practices. And if you look at their balance sheets, they all had basically the equal amount of money that they got in the Marshall Plan to save their bacon in strategic reserves. So they never needed the money. And we know six quarters later that they never needed the money.

Ron Barshop:

So that consolidation you're talking about has happened in healthcare. And I think my listener's tired of hearing about it because I talk about it too much. So that's perp one, is big business. We're going to call it big money cartel. The second perp, that's a little less obvious. You've already hinted at, it is social media and big media. And big media, again, in another chapter in your book is in very few hands. It's highly concentrated in a very few hands and it looks like big

media supported big money cartel, and they did it with a big megaphone. So let's call the second perp would you agree big media or big megaphone?

Gigi Foster:

Yeah, for sure. And I would say not just big, but also again monocultural, there is one narrative that gets spun. And of course we're seeing this in... even yesterday, somebody sent me an image of his comment or his attempt to put a comment into Facebook about my book and it got censored, because apparently that's not according to community standard. So that's what can happen.

Ron Barshop:

I've been punished on LinkedIn, my viewership is one fifth of what it was before I started talking about this stuff.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. There you go.

Ron Barshop:

I'm burned. Less obvious power is the power hunger of the polls and their appointed regulators. So they're making the rules. And so they're the big referee as well as the rule maker and they control OIG and FBI, so they can direct investigations of evil doers. So they're not only regulators, but they're also cops. So I call this the cops and the drivers of the getaway car, because they're definitely an accessory to the crime and they want to join the ranks of the big money cartel because they can get directorships and consulting gigs and lobby jobs. So they want to high five on the way up the ladder, the lobby is going out down the ladder with access because they did a good job for the big money guys.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. Look for sure. Everybody who had an opportunity here would want to be closer to power, closer to money. And it's just what people want. And of course, as an economist, I have to admit this as much as I don't think money is the most important thing in the world. Love is the most important thing, but money is very, very motivating for people. And so is power. So yes, if you are in a position to be seen as a regulator, be seen as someone who can be part of the solution by the unwitting populations, then it's very, very difficult to resist that.

Ron Barshop:

So sadly in this story, there's no Thanos. There's no single guy or girl who's the master manipulator or master villain. It's more like a mafia or cartel run by mostly decent people who are really beholden to their shareholder to their boards. But they're definitely profiting in a panic for sure, especially in healthcare. And now we've got the fourth member of this crime scene and that is Jane, James and Jasmine who are not only victims, but they're firsthand witnesses and they're an accessory to the crime. Now for my big question, why? Why are the crowds the great COVID panic? Why are they part of this crime? Why don't they see with clarity and why aren't they awake to what has actually happened to all of us?

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. So this is what's been the most interesting part of this whole period for me, Ron, is witnessing the crowd dynamic. It's not something that I've seen in my lifetime, most social scientists living today, won't have seen it, certainly not this seriously. And really only if you're a student of history would you even have been exposed to the reality of the power of a crowd. I don't know if you study the Second World War much in high school, but I took history, and I remember seeing videos of some of the Nazi rallies and thinking to myself, well, those people are nuts. They're just crazy. We clearly would never be like that today. Look at what they're doing. They're bonding together in these great, huge fields.

Gigi Foster:

And this is what the Nazis would do. They had this whole recipe for getting people revved up and excited and then willing to go right along with whatever the speaker, the fewer, whoever it was going to say. And it could be, oh, the Jewish person in the house next door is going to kill your kids or whatever. And they would go right along with it immediately. So I was watching evidence of this and seeing how people behaved and it was absolutely... I mean, it makes your hair stand on end and you think to yourself, at least I did when I was in high school, I thought, well, thank goodness we're not like that anymore. Thank goodness, as a people, as a species, we've gotten beyond that, we've learned our lesson, like, don't do that again. And yet here we are. And it is the same dynamic.

Gigi Foster:

And what happens in a crowd is basically everybody who becomes a member has been fixated on a particular obsession. And they all coalesce together on that obsession. And of course it started to be the obsession of COVID in March. And there was such fear around that, that that fear provided essentially a glue, almost like a magnetic force of the people who were so scared of COVID to come together and start to form this embryonic crowd, which then just gathered steam and gathered steam. And it's not a normal social group, like a nation state or a family or a company, because in those kinds of groups, you do have a common purpose, a common mission, but it's not the case that every single member is focused obsessively on one thing for a long period of time. And that is the defining feature of a crowd.

Gigi Foster:

These members of the crowd, or the Janes, were just fixated and everything else that mattered in normal times became just much, much, much less important. It just didn't matter. And the danger of a crowd is that people, individuals, will lose their own sense of morality, their own responsibility for constructing their own truths, goes completely out the window. And they give over those responsibilities to the crowd and to the person who has seen to be leading the crowd. And that's where the-

Ron Barshop:

I want to talk about how science has taken a vacation this last 18 months, because that's another important thing you bring up. And you actually outline the rolling snowball effect of how that happened. Before we do that, I want to talk about the hidden tragedy that you uncovered with your ingredients specialty. And I'm just going to reel off a few ingredients that most really

loving, caring people don't know about, which are the universal cost, the hidden tragedy to country programs. So for example, vaccines went to a screeching halt. So we have no mumps and measles and diphtheria and cholera shots that have stopped. And this results in at least 203,000 to 415,000 deaths directly attributable to that. We have 1.6 billion kids out of school. We have 3 million unsafe people walking around getting 3 million unsafe abortions. We have 7 million more unintended consequences presidencies.

Ron Barshop:

And add to that 2 million a quarter, because we don't have normal healthcare that we have. We've lost two planting seasons now, and the supply chain is devastated. So food inequity looks like 83 to 132 million people are now in food scarcity that worked before. A hundred million people, that's incredible extreme poverty which is \$1.90 a day is up 70 million people, mostly in Africa, 57,000 maternal deaths because they didn't have adequate healthcare. The list goes on. We have 1.16 million children who have had to step back from their schooling. It just goes on and on. That was a great assembled list that nobody really talks about. It's the hidden cost, the hidden tragedy.

Gigi Foster:

I mean, it's not hidden to some of us, Ron. I mean, all of these things are exactly what was going through my head back in March as potential dangers. If we push pause on the global economy, that's what will happen because our global world today, I mean we are interconnected like never before or pre-COVID we were. And that interconnectivity gives us the opportunity to deliver those services that keep people having better lives and longer lives and more robust and happy lives. And that includes non dying in childbirth. It includes having the vaccinations early for MMR and polio and all the other things. It includes having those supply chains work so that we can feed people. We were making great progress against inequality in particularly places like India, huge countries that have been set back probably a decade in our progress against poverty.

Gigi Foster:

I know when you're, when you introduced us, you were talking about the heartlessness of talking dollars when we think about lives saved. But really we live in a world of scarcity, so it's not just about putting a dollar value on somebody's life. It's about saying we only have a limited amount of resource to go around. How do we want to use it to produce the most human thrive thing? And that includes the black and brown people overseas, who are now because of our choices in developed economies, suffering and dying. And they will be for another decade because of what we have done.

Gigi Foster:

I mean, I see that as one of the most colossal areas of damage that indeed just isn't talked about in developed countries. I don't remember the last time on an Australian program that I heard anything about the developing world, whereas pre-COVID, all sorts of people would always bleed on about how all we needed to give more to the people in Africa and stuff like that. But that is just gone completely silent. And that's one of the characteristics, again, of a crowd. Everything else that used to matter just becomes basically unimportant in comparison to the obsession.

Ron Barshop:

When I talk about a peripheral issue, you don't really directly deal with it in your book, but it definitely is a different information campaign. And that is, HIV as a cocktail. Interferon alone will not answer for Magic Johnson to get rid of his HIV. But when you one, two, three, punch it with a cocktail that makes interferon sane, and it's a three-drug cocktail that has literally bombed the virus to oblivion for him and millions of people with HIV. Ivermectin as a cocktail apparently works to prevent and lessen and yes, eliminate the virus with Zithromax and certain [inaudible 00:36:19] steroids. It is attacked as a mono solution by the FDA, by the CDC, by the European equivalent of the same thing. And screw that drug, it's a horse dewormer. Leave it alone. It's no good, but in the cocktail, it's a genius solution.

Ron Barshop:

So in cancer therapy, we have 26,000 approved FDA drugs and brilliant people are getting together and saying, "What can we do to one, two, three punch, various types of cancer that are out there." And that we're having the same success in cancer the next 20 years that we had the last 40 years in heart disease, it's just getting hammered by cocktails. So here's my question. If we're going to crowdsource solutions for cancer cocktails and we've crowdsource solutions for HIV with a cocktail. And if every flu shot is basically a cocktail of COVID 17, and COVID 16 and COVID 15 and everything else, that is going to hurt us, why is interferon being attacked literally very elegantly as not a solution for people when it clearly is?

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. So you're saying about ivermectin, not interferon?

Ron Barshop:

[inaudible 00:37:22].

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. So ivermectin is a really classic poster child for basically a clue that things are not right at the moment in how we are coping and strategizing in our fight against COVID. I don't know if you know, but the Therapeutic Goods Administration here in Australia, the TGA, just earlier this week banned the off-label use of ivermectin specifically for COVID. And you look at that and you think, well, what on earth is happening? As you say, what happened to science? What happened to looking at evidence? Because there are very promising trials of ivermectin in combination with other things like zinc and also just by itself. And it's certainly at least worthy of a conversation. And yet we see so much effort put towards vaccination as the solution and nothing really, if anything, a negative attitude towards ivermectin.

Gigi Foster:

And this is again, all about, I hate to say it, money. Ivermectin is cheap to produce, it's incredibly safe. And even the very producer of ivermectin itself was trying to undersell how useful it might be against COVID because it wanted to make money off the vaccines. They're much, much more profitable. So don't underestimate the power again of money and profit to drive the decision-making and the optics that the big pharmaceutical companies will sell to the politicians. And they will then on sell to the population, which don't forget, still wants to be protected against COVID.

And they know what a vaccine is. They took vaccines when they were kids and stuff, and they gave it to their own children. So they trust the word vaccine so they can be sold the COVID vaccines much more easily than, oh, here's this complicated formula of stuff and it seems a bit messy. It's not as good of a sales pitch and it doesn't make nearly the money.

Ron Barshop:

I want to do a lightning round about how science has taken a vacation. Because this is an important part of the story, I think. So the first part you too tale in your book is at the same time, the Imperial College came out with a ridiculous numbers that had a 3% infection rate. Which is really today we know it's 0.2 of 1%. It's not even 1%. that 3% infection rate versus the Oxford team that got a lot closer with 0.14 again, 0.2 is the answer. So the Oxford team, which comes from a better school got hammered because it was a boring headline and the Imperial College was the operative number that everybody started, not only headlining, but using in their own studies. Explain that to us.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah, exactly. And as a scientist, I can tell you, this is how it works generally, but this is a horrible example. So if you happen to be the team that gets your favored number, the number from your study into the journal early on, and if you have a plausible defense of why it is what it is, you can essentially start up the cottage industry of studies about that phenomenon. And every subsequent study that gets submitted to journals for publication will be reviewed by the people who basically did research in that similar area. And so you can be the reviewer of the next guy's paper and the next guy reviews the next guys. And maybe you review the three or four generations [crosstalk 00:40:41].

Ron Barshop:

Okay. So you don't want to look bad next to the guy who did... You don't want to disagree with your own opinion is what you're saying?

Gigi Foster:

Exactly. You have a career incentive to accept the later papers that basically say that you were right. And so this is how a bad idea grows legs and sticks for a long time.

Ron Barshop:

Wow. Okay. And then The Lancet, which used to be maybe one of the four or five most important journals, you are calling for it to be de journaled, because the science has been so bad in the Lancet over and over again. They've actually had to retract studies. Then you have formal institutions like the Lancet getting co-opted and not walking things back.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. That's right. Exactly. And that's just again, the co-optation and the capture of editorial teams and the reviewers being in a crowd, and part of the crowd that had an incentive to keep the madness and the silliness going, has happened in economics as well. I've been very ashamed of my profession over here in Australia, but around the world, because we've basically acted on mass like apologists for what has happened rather than pushing back. And I mean, I've provided

a draft cost benefit analysis, but I've locked down policies here for one of our states, but there's basically nothing else being contributed that is sensible insane. And it's all been very, very apologetic or just on something completely different as if somehow COVID policy isn't the greatest policy failure of our time and that we shouldn't be even having an opinion about it. I mean, that's not so well.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. Now we've got a very few epidemiologists, but of the thousands of epidemiologists they start piling on one dimensional solutions to say, "Lockdown," and they're completely ignoring the cost, the 24 million, for example, per lost person. They're going to cost of lockdown to entrepreneurs, to the poor, to children, et cetera. So it's a 1D chess versus a 3d chess epidemiology reports that they're giving to the government officials.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. Now we have exactly that problem here as well. And I mean, in some sense you can't blame them. I don't know what they learned in epidemiological school, but I doubt that they learned about business failure or the interdependence of economies or the people's needs for social interaction. They are focused on the thing they were trying to focus on, but this is the danger of not including multiple perspectives in your decision-making team when you're facing a crisis. And that's been one of the greatest mistakes of this period. And I'm hoping that when we build back here in Australia and other places, we will recognize that that preservation of diversity of thought is so, so important. And we have to build our institutions in a way that respects that diversity and brings it to bear on future crises, because otherwise we will end up just as vulnerable to becoming really stupid, really fast, which is what happened here in Australia and many other countries in the world.

Ron Barshop:

And now the fourth stage is once science and medicine starts getting pushback, they start demanding 100% certainty about the cost versus benefit of making a claim, but then they won't defend theirs at 100%. So they're putting into an impossible standard.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. I mean, that's an interesting clue as well about the fact that something's rotten in Denmark and I don't just mean Denmark, the world really, is that the burden of proof has shifted. So when draconian policies like lockdowns were being introduced, in normal times, you'd expect that the person proposing them would have to defend them on the basis that they were worth it. The cost benefit analysis yielded a net benefit from those policies. But actually what happened is that people who were resisting them like myself and a few other people were expected to argue that they were not a good idea to prove to people, this is really not a good idea. Now that's what's shifting of the normal burden of proof. And that should begin clue you in that there's normal science and normal processing of decision-making inputs and scenarios and options has just flown out the window during this period with a crowd dynamic and the fear and the big money and all the other bits and pieces of the crime scene that you've been pointing out.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. Now the fifth stage is when the government decides to make a move. Now they've got to do something. They got to look like they're doing something. So China had the first mover advantage. Of course, they started in Wuhan. So the first mover makes some lockdown moves, hides information, provides massive disinformation, shuts people down, imprisons people, they famously... I don't know if we can say they killed the first doctor that brought it up, but they definitely did not help itself. And every other government started following suit in that same model. In fact, the Japanese minister in your book calls the World Health Organization, who they co-opted the Chinese Health Organization, because they were so owned by essentially Chinese influence.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. I mean, I think this was really a case where the West initially thought that the same strategy would never sell. They looked at China and they thought there's no way that we can get our democratic Western populations to do this. But then they saw how fearful those populations were and the politicians needed to be seen to be delivering protection. And it's so much was about the optics in those early days. And they thought, well, maybe we'll try it whatever. And there was a lot of back and forth, and we document this a bit in the book where, for example, Brett Sutton, who is the Chief Health Officer in Victoria, initially said, "Well, we're definitely not going to close schools." And then a week later said, "Well, we're closing the schools."

Gigi Foster:

So there was a lot of flip-flopping, same thing on mass mandates the politicians were basically experimenting. They were trying out, they were pushing to test to see where the value would be seen to lie. And it turned out that locked down just like China seemed like the thing that the populations would accept. Then the rest of the world followed suit like dominoes.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. And then part of that is redefining words. So the Great Britain crime that they admitted to and apologized for later, the scientists to say, redefine the word case, they redefined the word infection, they redefined the word COVID death so that the math would play to their narratives.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. And this is actually, again, a feature of normal science, unfortunately, is that there are often words used in the jargon of scientific disciplines that are not using the same way and in lay person terminology. So when you hear case fatality rate, for example, and you say, "Oh, case fatality rate 3%." To the guy on the street that says, "Well, if I get this disease, then I've got a 3% chance of dying." That's what the natural brain of Joe Blobs is going to think, but that's not true. And the scientists who initially were publishing these papers with those kinds of headlines and numbers, they knew that that's not really the right interpretation, but they did not push back against that interpretation. And in that they failed their responsibility. They abrogated their responsibility and their duty of care to the people they report to and the societies that they serve.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. The next stage, there's only two more of these folks. And then we're going to wind the show up, it's long show, is do something. If you're a public official, you have to coach some

action out of your people and pretend it's going to have some evidence that you that it works, whether it has evidence or not. So again, it's a complete back turning on science in this case, lockdowns. What's that all about?

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. So this is the politician syllogism. I don't know if your audience members know the wonderful BBC television series, *Yes Minister* and *Yes Prime Minister*, but it comes up there. And the syllogism for the politician is, well, we have to be seen to do something. So they're feeling pressure from the population to act. Well, what can we do? Well, there is something let's do that. So there's no tether between the actual action itself and the presumed problem. It's simply about looking like you are doing something to solve the problem. And there's very much of a religiosity in this, this notion of, well, we'll make this sacrifice. We'll throw lots of money at it. We'll close the schools. We'll make you wear masks. We'll make sacrifices that are painful, but we'll get rewarded in the end.

Gigi Foster:

This is a religious type of story that's going on in the minds of the population. And even probably some of the politicians who started to buy into it. So it really is something that is very deep in us. And maybe one of the reasons why people have been so willing to go along with this is because they were so scared, just like the fear of the South Americans that the sun wouldn't come up in the morning early many, many centuries ago. And so they sacrifice our own children in the hope that that would placate the gods and they would see the sunrise the next morning. In the same way, have we seen the sacrifices being made on the alter of saving lives to COVID when in fact, probably our policy choices have had very little to do with what's actually happened in terms of the virus trajectory, and really has been much more about geography, demography, biology and the general state of the health system and the population density in various different countries.

Ron Barshop:

The last two are group think. And this is again where the Pew Research comes in, that people largely think we're doing the right thing here even though we have deaths per million of 10 to 50 times that of the three countries, I mentioned, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. And group thing is where macro economists all got together and they completely ignored that the harm is going to be worse than the solution with the lockdowns. They just literally glossed over it.

Gigi Foster:

Yeah. No, exactly. And they only look at one side, I see this as well here now in the argumentation, not just by macro economists, but many scientists, they just don't understand the possibility that maybe the cure could be worse than the disease, essentially. That there is a huge cost to the policy actions we've taken. And the result that we should be looking for is not just a narrow result about COVID deaths and suffering. It is the total holistic results about human wellbeing, and human thriving. And when you lose sight of that, it's very, very dangerous. And you forget that the trade-offs that you're making inevitably with every single policy choice.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. And finally, the mantra. You got to have a mantra, you got to have a mission, you got to have a... bring our boys back. This mantra has flattened the curve and they didn't work so well so they changed the mantra. What is that all about?

Gigi Foster:

Oh, yeah. I mean, that was basically the initial selling points when, again, the politicians were pressing to test. Well, flatten the curve, that sounds reasonable. We'll let the health system prepare and then we'll eventually open up and we will just have to take this wave. But I think basically the politicians thought well, particularly here in Australia, we can kind of keep the virus at bay, if we just keep those borders closed, we really need to open the borders. People are still really scared. If I open those borders, then I might lose my seat at the next election. That's not cool. I think I'll just keep them closed a little longer. So it's a bit of the slippery slope phenomenon. Once you start making the argument that you can restrict freedoms and be safe, it's very seductive to keep restricting them even more and selling the idea that you're keeping people safe. That flatten the curve, and then eliminate the virus, I mean, there's always a different story.

Gigi Foster:

Now it's the vaccine hero story. I don't know if your audiences are artistic at all, but my son is writing a musical about this whole period. And one of his songs is called Flatten the Curve. And it's all about the sales pitch that was initially discovered to work and then just transition to the next and the next and the next package. So I just hope people can wake up before really even more dangerous package is sold to them

Ron Barshop:

This is a crime scene folks. There are perpetrators that are well-intentioned folks, but there's a murder mystery here that's been solved today. There's a con job that's been solved here today. There's a giant heist that's been solved here today. And if you get The Great Covid Panic: What Happened, Why, and What To Do Next, you'll have a roadmap for what to do next.

Ron Barshop:

So Gigi, I got a minute, there's just so much more to talk about, but I promise you a half hour and you'd deliver me double. So thank you so much for your time and for paying attention to this issue from a real interesting perspective that most of us don't think about.

Gigi Foster:

It's my pleasure, Ron. Thanks for having me on the show.

Ron Barshop:

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