



**WE ARE CHANGED  
COVID-19  
THE NEW NORMS &  
ALTERED REALITY**

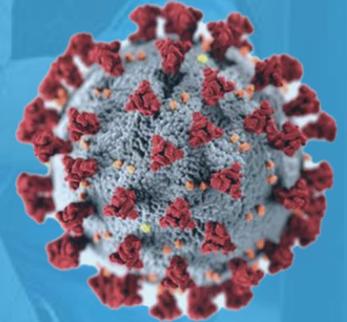
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**BY AHMAD MOURAD**

# INTRODUCTION

By now, COVID has undoubtedly altered our reality; we are completely changed and can no longer revert to and work with old norms previously accepted. While this crisis shall too pass indeed and should not be feared, and while COVID continues to pose significant danger, we must not miss this unparalleled opportunity to leapfrog humanity, protect and improve the future of human race, and ensure such crises never take place again.

Above all, I am heartened by the Healthcare industry and its leadership's tireless efforts to combat this crisis. I am inspired by all the heroes, families, friends and individuals bravely confronting COVID, by every life-saving act or attempt to heal, by every act of giving and caring, every act of courage, every act of unity, every act of love and humanity that are beautifully and diversely witnessed across the world.



## WE ARE CHANGED

COVID confirmed, once again, that health is humanity's most paramount asset, the cornerstone of human safety and continuity, and the foundation of economic growth and prosperity. We vividly witnessed that regardless of the continents, region and country, regardless of the level of education, wealth and maturity, healthcare remains heavily underinvested and largely not in a state of readiness, even in the most advanced and developed countries. Sadly, as a global society we learned, once again the hard way, that quality and patients' outcomes -undoubtedly the core measure of care- supersede all arguments around cost and volume.

On the one hand, COVID has literally halted almost every aspect of our lives and confronted us with unimaginable tragedies and challenges. On the other, COVID has vividly been the most powerful wakeup call since World War II (WWII) and the catalyst for accelerating innovation and exponential change that weeks ago were feared, opposed and strongly contested by many governments, industries, policy makers, leadership, special groups and individuals. Fear of innovation and technological advancements, siloed and limiting digital health laws and regulations, theoretical debates and schools of thought on data privacy and use of technology in healthcare at national and global level, amongst others, continue to be important to address. However, we now recognize how desperately humankind needs practical frameworks and solutions that effectively tackle and provide quality of care, or at least adequately handle crises and pandemics such as COVID.

## VALUE IN HEALTHCARE

Underinvested healthcare systems, prioritizing cost over quality of healthcare products and solutions, siloed and lack of integrated platforms and frameworks, challenges in forming the healthcare dream team (humans and technology), amongst others directly compromised the lives of many patients, doctors, clinical and non-clinical staff. By proactively ensuring the readiness of quality outcomes healthcare systems, and by endorsing local and global technological advancements and

readiness, healthcare investments could have saved many lives. This includes anything from simple physical temperature taking and medications giving tasks that could have been safely and easily performed by remotely controlled robots without jeopardizing the safety of doctors and nurses, to automated COVID tests, collection, tracking, advanced algorithms, data analytics, sharing, leveraging and sense-making of insightful data-driven decisions at country, regional and global level, all the way to the speedy and mass production of ventilators, personal protective equipment, masks and many other healthcare and public products and services that can be easily supported, automated and performed by technology, which would have protected the healthy while improving the efficacy of care and safety for the sick.

## **THE CRITICAL ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY**

COVID confirmed once again that technology is not deterministic and a powerful force of good for humanity. If not for technology and its unprecedented adoption during COVID, things could have been much worse, and this evil pandemic could have had even more devastating consequences. Technology was leveraged almost everywhere: from telehealth, to mobile congestions mapping and drones crowd monitoring, to nationwide coronavirus screening portals and digital movement permits, remote working leveraging video conferencing capabilities, to online learnings and professional education trainings, to digitally enabled delivery of goods and services, to real time human social interactions overcoming physical social distancing and embracing virtual connectedness, to online yoga, meditation and delivery of health and fitness sessions, to virtual family and friends meet and games, to real time songs writing and composing by people in isolation, to live online “Kids Got Talent” and virtual TED talks, and many others. The common enabler is technology, fueled by human willpower and its strong spirit. It is unthinkable to even imagine how we could have handled COVID without technology.

Technology has already created new norms and expedited the transition to a global digital society. Enabled by technology, major events and forums went virtual including G20 countries’ leaders meeting. Data privacy and transparency was largely put to good use to map out outbreaks in order to contain the virus and help protect societies. Innovation accelerated exponentially and we witnessed promising public-private partnerships that would have been unimaginable pre-COVID. Artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare and science gained unprecedented momentum, especially in areas of diagnosis and prognosis of COVID. What we have witnessed in weeks and months would have taken years and decades pre-COVID, and such adoption, scale of transformation, willingness to leverage AI and other technological advancements will leapfrog healthcare of the 21st century and radically shape many other industries.

## **RETHINK HEALTHCARE**

Healthcare is surely one of the most complex industries. With noble intentions aimed at improving and protecting public health, many fears exist that traditional systems and way of thinking -global, regional and local- have over the years inadvertently constrained and crippled the healthcare ecosystem from providing quality care and saving lives, especially in the COVID pandemic. Therefore, accountability and great responsibility rely on all governments, leaders, nationalists, globalists and good citizens to rethink the “AS IS”, to transform to new healthcare delivery models keeping patients’ health outcomes at the center of care, to leverage the new norms, to challenge the traditional thought leadership, to safely and securely exploit digital health and data, to ensure patient centric laws and regulations, and to innovatively strike the right balance with cost and other elements of care while not, under any circumstance, compromise on patient quality outcomes, especially in situations such as the COVID pandemic.

Healthcare must be reinvented, and we owe this to Lloyed in New York who lost his mother and brother to coronavirus, we owe it to ICU nurse D’Neil Schmall who sobbed in tears tired of walking into rooms to find her patients dying, we owe it to Karen in the United Kingdom who was gasping for air and fighting for her own and the life of her 6 months unborn baby, we owe it to Kelly and millions of frontline workers in Italy, United States, Spain, Canada, China and many other countries in the trenches taking care of patients, working insane hours, falling asleep on the floors or on their desks, getting infected while treating patients, with thousands critically sick and many dead. We owe it to the heroes working with severe shortage or no

personal protection equipment transforming garbage bags into gowns to wear, we owe it to hundreds of thousands if not millions who would lose their lives to COVID, to the millions of families and friends who lost their loved ones, to the daughter who lost a father, to the husband who lost a partner, to the millions who became unemployed and lost their only source of income, to the billions of people who got forced into weeks and months of isolation, deprived from their basic rights and freedom of movement due to the lockdowns and curfews. We owe it to the burden of COVID on mental health and severe emotional distress of people around the world, we owe it to many other countless souls and reasons.

COVID brought disruption, death, suffering and discomfort, however it serves no good to only focus on the hurt and destruction of COVID. Humanity would be better off concentrating on the lessons learned, mistakes not to ever be repeated, transformation and changes that must be immediately triggered. COVID is not to be feared, but to be recognized, understood and leveraged as an unprecedented opportunity for governments, industries, public and private sectors, leadership, policy makers, associations, special groups, ethicists, scientists, teachers, people of all walk of life to collaborate locally and globally, to fundamentally rethink and ethically reinvent health for humanity. COVID provided a unique opportunity to pause and deeply reflect, to critically think and realign priorities and strategies.

It's been said that crises do not create character but rather reveal it. In the case of COVID, I tend to disagree and truly hope that not only COVID revealed what we are made of, but just as importantly completely transformed and further elevated our sense of care, responsibility and global citizenship; a transformation with new norms filled with compassion, great deeds of courage, wisdom and appreciation of the quality and true value of health for humanity.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahmad Mourad is a Senior Business Technology Leader, Strategist, Business Transformation Catalyst, Digital Advisor and Influencer with over 25 years of experience in Healthcare, IT and Telecom, in both Government and Private sectors. He is a frequent public speaker, and author of various publications on technology, healthcare and business matters.



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