

## **LETTER | Covid-19: When it hits home**

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LETTER | Covid-19 is something I have read about, seen around me, and have fear of every day for almost 48 months now. After all this time, it has finally hit home. Pray as we may otherwise, it has happened and what has happened cannot be undone.

Of all places, Whatsapp became a medium in which the news traversed. Yes, the very same Whatsapp where fake news flourishes. My oldest aunt (who is registered for the vaccine and is well over 60 years of age) contracted Covid-19 in the past week or so. Her way of seeking support and solace? Taking a picture of her results and sending it to members of our large family using Whatsapp.

She is, for the most part, illiterate but has recently learned how to send emojis and messages via Whatsapp. One could never imagine that the only place she has found some semblance of happiness would be the platform she would use to convey her tragedy. She is a woman of few words, so it makes sense that she

would choose a picture over a message.

I was going over facts at that moment: this is an aunt who stays away from the outside world, who is a shut-in. An aunt who is a homemaker. The oldest member of the family. How could she contract the virus?

Now, lots of news pundits, as well as medical and health professionals, talk about physical or social distancing. In recent weeks, we have read and consumed so much information about the vaccine rollout in Malaysia. In fact, in recent days, we have gathered that the vaccine rollout has been focused on members of the public who are senior citizens.

This leads to a personal rumination: my aunt is a senior citizen who has by automatic operation, practised physical distancing. More importantly, she is registered for the vaccine. Is the question one of vaccine hesitancy or is it one of vaccine availability? It's hard to say or really decipher what went wrong here.

Perhaps the issue was that she is both a grandmother and a mother, who has children to care for, and grandchildren she loves. All her life has been of service and sacrifice. This is not a woman who knows the finer things in life.

The only thing she holds dear is how she keeps her home clean. Among all of us,

she is arguably the most clean-conscious. Hygiene is her middle name. It could be said homebody is her last name. She has not a reckless bone in her frail body.

This is a woman who knows pain and suffering well, having only recently come out very slowly from the shackles of grief. On her road to recovery from the grief of losing her son, she has found the Covid-19 virus instead. How much can one person shoulder?

Should we place the blame on her children? It is said that asymptomatic carriers are the villains in our midst. Why go there, you may ask? Only because this is the most likely conclusion here. The real facts are few and far between.

In usual circumstances where members of our family suffer in silence, we blame ourselves. I should have visited her more often, get her to stop serving her family and instead focus on her own safety in these times. But I was trying to be responsible amidst a global pandemic. It was a deliberate act on my part, not seeing her since the early days of the pandemic. It was ultimately to keep her safe.

A few weeks ago, she gave me a call, worrying about my safety as I regularly take the LRT Kelana Jaya line during the hours that the collision occurred on May 24. Little did we know that the real "hazard" was the Covid-19 virus, which would

somehow seep its way into our family, just like it has many other families. Little did we know that it was her safety that was being jeopardised by the selfish acts of her children.

Truth be told; however, all this is mere speculation. What comes after speculation? Regret. Regret comes after speculation: if she was good with technology, perhaps the first AstraZeneca opt-in would have prevented this. So many youths were vaccinated then, why not her?

The reader may say that I am prone to over-exaggeration. I would argue that no, this is a situation that should have been avoided. My aunt is a woman who cannot spend even a day away from home. She is now having to spend some days at the Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang (Maeps).

It should not be her. It should be the social butterflies who are so averse to making sacrifices that spend their nights away from home. The only thought I have in mind now is to pray for her recovery and hope that maybe her nights in Maeps will be her break from reality.

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