

Dear Editor

Nelson is rightⁱ. Covid 19 isn't the only global emergency. We still have a chance – just – to act on the other emergency – Climate - reduce inequalities and save lives. Holgate reminds us that the air we breathe carries danger as well as life. Once the dangers of air pollution in London were recognised in the 1950s, the Clean Air Acts that followed reduced fossil fuel emissions with dramatic effectⁱⁱ.

If turning to the other emergency whilst pre-occupied with Covid feels futile, there are words of comfort from Piet Hein, a Danish scientist using a pen as his weapon during the Nazi occupation.

Losing one glove is certainly painful,
But nothing
Compared to the pain,
Of losing one,
Throwing away the other,
And finding
The first one again.

Piet Heinⁱⁱⁱ

Even so, change is tricky. Academics and clinicians frequently make recommendations for others, but what happens when *we* are the ones who need to change? How do individuals and institutions balance one set of values—improved air quality and a reduction in respiratory problems - against others - travel for global citizenship or new hospital buildings?

Researchers, young people, clinicians and local citizens along with the hospital's sustainability lead are using Global Action Plan/Great Ormond Street Hospital's Clean Air framework^{iv v} – a global first – as the basis for discussion around air quality. Along with colleagues in the Bartlett School of Planning and Laws at UCL and the university's head of sustainability, we're exploring how lay and specialist knowledge can feed into policy and bring about evidence-informed change locally and beyond^{vi}.

COVID-19 affords an unprecedented opportunity to view the world as it could be when air pollution is reduced. One more report thudding onto the desk of policy makers is not the way to get their attention, and the response to the current crisis means that rather than shouting from the outside 'let us in, let us in' we are pushing on a door that is ajar.

Competing interests: No competing interests

Helen M Roberts
Professor of Child Health Research
@childHealth_ICH

Roz Shafran
Professor of Translational Psychology
@ich_ppp

UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, London WC1N 1EH

ⁱ Nelson B. The positive effects of covid-19. *BMJ* 2020;369:m1785 doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1785

ⁱⁱ Holgate S Preface, *The Air we Breathe: the Lifelong Impact of Air Pollution*, 2016, RCP, London
<https://bit.ly/1Nv4CIa>

ⁱⁱⁱ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Hein_\(scientist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Hein_(scientist))

^{iv} https://healthycitydesign2020.salus.global/uploads/media/conference_lecture_presentation/0001/20/0a647984983e7652a2e68884ec7dd46e564ff65e.pdf

^v https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/files/clean_air_hospital_framework.pdf

^{vi} <https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/clean-air-hospital-framework/>