



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on June 2, 2020

## Italian Doctors Say Coronavirus Losing Potency

“In reality, the virus clinically no longer exists in Italy,” [claims](#) Dr. Alberto Zangrillo, who is the chief of the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan, Italy. Milan is in Lombardy, which has been the area most affected by the coronavirus outbreak in Italy.

“The swabs that were performed over the last 10 days showed a viral load in quantitative terms that was absolutely infinitesimal compared to the ones carried out a month or two months ago,” Dr. Zangrillo told RAI TV on Sunday.



Italy was hit early and hard by COVID-19, suffering from the third-highest death toll in the world from the pandemic. Since the outbreak was first noted on February 21, 33,415 Italians have died. Italy has the sixth-highest number of cases in the world so far, at 233,019.

Both infections and deaths have steadily declined in the past month, and the country is now relaxing very strong restrictions. One reason that Italy suffered more than most other European countries is that it has an older population compared to most other countries in Europe.

“We’ve got to get back to being a normal country,” Zangrillo insisted. “Someone has to take responsibility for terrorizing the country.”

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Zangrillo’s claims were met with caution by the undersecretary of the Italian Ministry of Health, Sandra Zampa, who said, “Pending scientific evidence to support the thesis that the virus has disappeared.... I would invite those who say they are sure of it not to confuse Italians. We should instead invite Italians to maintain the maximum caution, maintain physical distancing, avoid large groups, to frequently wash their hands and to wear masks.”

But Zangrillo is not the only physician in Italy to notice the rapid weakening of the virus. Dr. Matteo Bassetti, chief of the infectious disease clinic in Genoa’s San Martino Hospital, told the national ANSA news agency, “The strength the virus had two months ago is not the same strength it has today. It is clear that today the Covid-19 disease is different.”

Not surprisingly, however, there were some who quickly challenged the optimism of the two prominent Italian physicians. Dr. Mike Ryan, the executive director of the World Health Organization’s Health Emergencies Programme, was pessimistic. In a press conference called after the good news from Italy, Ryan warned, “We need to be exceptionally careful that we are not creating a sense that all of a sudden the virus has decided to be less pathogenic. That is not the case at all,” stressing that the coronavirus is still a “killer.”

Maria Van Kerhove, a World Health Organization epidemiologist, expressed similar warnings. “In terms of transmissibility, that has not changed, in terms of severity, that has not changed.”

Bruce Y. Lee, writing in *Forbes*, adamantly opposed the conclusions of the Italian medical doctors.



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“Viruses like the Covid -19 coronavirus aren’t like Viagra. They don’t automatically lose potency over time. Yes, there is a possibility that less dangerous versions of the virus could emerge and eventually become more prevalent than the initial version.” But, Lee wrote, there could also emerge a “more dangerous” version.

“Moreover,” Lee argued, “the amount of virus found on testing swabs is not necessarily a measure of the potency of a virus. It is simply a measure of what’s in the sample that you got from sticking a cotton swab up a person’s nose or to the back of his or her throat.” Instead, Lee insisted, you have to have “studies.”

Lee also discounted the likelihood that SARS-CoV2 (another name for COVID-19) could decrease in activity in the warmer summer months, like the flu virus. He said that was like comparing apples to oranges.

Finally, Lee said that even if the Italian doctors are proven correct in their assertions, “that wouldn’t necessarily mean that the same will eventually apply elsewhere. What happens in Italy could just stay in Italy.”

With his snarky comments about Viagra and the twist on the old saying, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” one might think Lee is some sort of specialist in male sexual problems, rather than any kind of expert in infectious diseases.

It is appropriate to ask, just who is Bruce Y. Lee? One would think that his bold challenge to two important Italian doctors would mean that Lee is a prominent physician himself. Not at all. On the contrary, Lee is not even a physician, but rather a journalist and a self-described “computational and digital health expert.”

Lee has said, “My work has included developing computational approaches, models, and tools to help health and healthcare decision makers in all continents (except for Antarctica).” Lee proudly notes that his work is supported by a variety of sponsors, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, and the Global Fund. Such a listing reminds one of Claude Rains’ comments about “the usual suspects” in the classic movie *Casablanca*.

Also, his Facebook page promotes the drug Remdesivir to fight the coronavirus, while simultaneously noting that Plaquenil (the brand name for hydroxychloroquine) has not been proven effective against COVID-19. That reminds us of Gomer Pyle’s “surprise, surprise, surprise.”

In other words, WHO opposes the optimistic findings of the two prominent Italian physicians. And a “computer modeler” financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation likewise discounts their optimistic statements. One can draw one’s own conclusions as to whom to believe.



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