

On Mon, Mar 23, 2020 at 7:01 PM McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:

Thank you. I'll definitely have questions. One that I keep getting asked is: "Is the virus mutating?" To which the answer is yes, of course, but I'm not hearing of any different effects of different variants. If you see any of that, please let me know. Thank you, Donald

On Mon, Mar 23, 2020 at 4:06 PM Kristian G. Andersen <> wrote:

I can only imagine how crazy it must be at the moment - New York will round 100k cases by the end of the week :((provided testing can keep up - which it probably can't).

Sounds good about tabling this for later and focus on much more urgent matters - like the (sadly depressing, but really great and necessary) story about how to deal with this long-term you wrote yesterday.

Enjoy that couch, and please let me know if there's anything I can help out with.

Best,

Kristian

On Mon, Mar 23, 2020 at 12:03 PM McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:

HI, Kristian: When I was 3/4 finished with the story, everything went mad here in New York and is still mad. I'm working 20-hour days from my girlfriends' couch and don't see that ending soon. My editors want me to keep looking into the future as much as possible, rather than finish this story when things slow down I very much want to get back to it. Thanks Donald (you can read anything I've published recently at the link below) D

On Fri, Mar 20, 2020 at 6:28 PM Kristian G. Andersen <> wrote:

Hi Don,

How are things over there? Did you ever get any further with this story? A lot has happened since and we have now also published a paper specifically looking at this question:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9>

Somewhat surprisingly, the paper has garnered a lot of interest and is the #1 paper out of ~ 15 million tracked by Altmetric - so a huge amount of interest around this question. <https://www.altmetric.com/details/77676422#score>.

There's of course more to the story than just the paper and I would be happy to go into some of this if there is still interest.

I hope all is well and you're hanging in there. Please let me know if you'd like to set up a time to chat.

Best,

Kristian

On Thu, Feb 20, 2020 at 9:22 AM McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:

Dealing with people who think they've got sources deep in the Deep State is more infuriating than you can imagine. It's how we helped start the Iraq war...

Linda Saif asked me if I'd send her questions by email. Can I send you the same ones?

They are:

Basically, I'm trying to write a narrative of how this crazy rumor that the virus is something released by a lab, specifically the Wuhan INstitute of Virology, developed.

Can you tell me when you first heard the rumors, and what went through your head?

Assuming they seemed unlikely, did you do anything?

On about February 1, the White House Office of Science Technology and Policy began investigating the rumors about the origins of the virus.

Were you part of that? What happened?

Also -- when you heard the rumors, did you contact colleagues in China? What did they say?

Did you give them any suggestions on how to counter the rumor? Anything like that?

Peter said his colleagues like Dr. Zengli Shi at WIV, eventually had to break off contact because a different variant of the rumor had taken hold in China -- that the new virus was invented by the CIA.

On social media, any scientist accused of cooperating with Americans or who was quoted in the American media became suspect and was publicly attacked, he said.

Did you see anything like that happening?

Have you been attacked for any of your work? Can you tell me what was said, how you replied, or if you just ignored it?

Where do things stand now? I saw you signed the letter to the Lancet. Has it had any effect?

Thanks very much for your help,

Donald

On Wed, Feb 19, 2020 at 5:07 PM Kristian G. Andersen <> wrote:

Hi Don,

National security? Spooks? I wish my life was that exciting, but I unfortunately don't have anything to add here - my existence isn't really in Technicolor, so I'm just focused on the science ;-). Specifically, we have been trying to understand the timing, origin, and transmission of the virus. As we outline in our "Proximal Origin of SARS CoV2" post on Virological, the data is consistent with a natural scenario and inconsistent with a scenario involving any type of deliberate genetic engineering.

Our post on Virological is currently under peer review and we're still getting feedback from a lot of people to ensure that once published, the scientific message

will be as clear as possible. In parallel, we're extremely busy working on more lay-language material (including FAQs) that we hope will help clarify important questions about the virus and epidemic to the general public. We are hoping that all of this will be finalized within the next couple of weeks, so happy to loop back with you once all of that is complete.

Quick comment on the pangolins - as I mentioned in my previous email I don't think the data is suggestive of them being intermediate hosts. In fact, the more data I see, the more suggestive it is to me that they're not - they might have been wrongly blamed and out there is some yet-to-be discovered intermediate host.

Best of luck with the story and please let me know if I can help out with any of the scientific questions.

Oh, and yes - I'm back out of the desert - the bars really weren't all that...

Cheers,
Kristian

On Wed, Feb 19, 2020 at 11:49 AM McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:

Hi, Kristian,

As you know, for more than two weeks now, we've been struggling to write something definitive about the ongoing rumor that the virus was either a bioweapon or a stored virus that was accidentally released from a Chinese lab.

It's been a struggle.

In the beginning, the top editors were convinced there was plausibility to the rumor, essentially because the White House had asked for an investigation. And because colleagues covering the world of national security had sources (spooks, not scientists) saying "We're still looking into it. Anything is possible, you know."

I think I have finally convinced the editors that the rumors are nonsense, that the overwhelming genetic evidence is that it's a bat virus that made its way into mankind through an intermediary host, likely pangolins.

The [letter in the Lancet](#) helped. So did the [paper on Proximal Origin of SARS CoV2](#).

Now they'd like me/us to tell the story as a narrative: When did Scientist X first hear the rumor? How? How did he/she react? Did the White House call? Did reporters call? Was there a fierce debate? Was there pushback from the conspiracy theorists? What happened then? And so on, with Scientist Y and Scientist Z, to explain how the story unfolded.

Could we talk about that? Not just about the science, but what went on in your head and in your life while this was unfolding?

And if you know what was going on with Chinese scientists too, I'd appreciate hearing that. I have no contact there.

Anything that adds color to the story would be useful.

I'm at my desk on <> or on my cell at <>.

Thanks,

Donald



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Donald G. McNeil Jr.

Science Correspondent