

LETTERS

Pandemic Shows How Fast Medicine Can Move

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Eric Topol's "The Hyper-Acceleration of the Life Sciences" (Review, March 20) correctly celebrates the medical research community's Covid vaccine and treatment successes. One key was industry-government partnerships. Traditional competitors also collaborated to compress time and regulators allowed overlapping safety/efficacy reviews, two strategies we began advocating decades ago.

There's no doubt we can apply Covid's lessons to accelerate progress against other infectious diseases, cancer, Alzheimer's and more. Yet let's remember some of Covid's collateral damage: nearly 1,000 delayed or cancelled clinical trials, foregone childhood immunizations, compounded racial and ethnic disparities, and extreme economic dislocation that was felt most acutely in minority communities. The Milken Institute's FasterCures Center advocates a comprehensive plan to assure that we're better prepared: build an effective early warning system for emerging pathogens; invest heavily in new product development and manufacturing capacity; formalize research collaborations; expand clinical trial innovations; collect real-world data faster; and reduce health-care disparities.

We should never return to the boom-and-bust cycles that funded research only when a crisis arose. The crisis is here—not only in the potential for future pandemics, but also in the tragic suffering and economic consequences of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and other dementias whose impact continues to grow.

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