

Covid-19 vaccine, apartheid and xenophobia: no need to panic!

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Welcome to this December issue of *African Health Sciences* in our 21st year of publication. We bring you papers largely on infectious disease which range from Covid-19 to HIV. Interesting, because Covid-19 has reached a watershed, with the announcement of a new variant (Omicron), that has exposed the discriminatory world that had demonstrated vaccine apartheid, and now infectious disease xenophobia. Ironically both situations have some link with South Africa. The word *apartheid* was conceived and implemented in racial South Africa, where black people were treated like they were non-human.¹ When liberation and independence came, the non-South Africans from neighboring countries that had supported the liberation struggle suffered in a wave of xenophobia.^{2,3}

And come Covid-19! What happens? The high-income countries buy and hoard vaccines ostensibly to protect their citizens. And when the new Covid-19 variant is detected in southern African countries, what do the high-income countries do? They go into panic mode⁴ and introduce draconian measures to exclude travelers from those countries. Many of those countries have described the action as xenophobia. Unfortunately, Covid-19 and climate change have taught us that this small fragile planet is a small village. When people in one part of the world sneeze all of us are in potential danger. We can pretend that hoarding vaccines or locking out peo-

ple whose skin color is different from ours will protect us, but this is a fallacy!

What we need is global unity, solidarity and practice universal *ubuntu* - a South African word that means "humanity". It is also called the "I am because we are" humanness that puts people first regardless of their color or creed. Unless we practice *ubuntu*, we are very unlikely to control this Covid-19 pandemic!

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