Eating my words

When I sent my last mini editorial\(^1\) to my copy editing team, I remarked in the accompanying email that I hoped I wouldn’t have to eat my words. Well, now it seems I am having to do just that. To be fair to myself, my initial editorial was about the media response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, and I would still say that it was overhyped. But at the time of writing I don’t think that I had grasped the potential for the virus to spread across the globe as rapidly as it has.

The World Health Organization (WHO) African Region publication, the Weekly Bulletin on Outbreaks and Other Emergencies, of 17 March 2020\(^2\) reported that a further 19 countries in the WHO African Region had reported confirmed cases of the virus, adding to Algeria, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and South Africa (SA), which had reported confirmed cases a week earlier. Four other African countries that are not WHO Member States have also reported confirmed cases. At the time that this bulletin was published, there were 175 confirmed cases and 4 deaths (case fatality ratio 2.3%). This total does not include the 4 countries outside the WHO African Region, which add a further 158 confirmed cases and 4 deaths (case fatality ratio 2.5%). Worryingly for SA, at the time the WHO African Region had reported confirmed cases of the virus, publication of that in the Garden Route, where I now live, but behavioural change takes longer in smaller communities. I have managed, with a lot of persuasion, to get my local running club to cancel weekly time trials (or at least the socialising in the bar afterwards) for the time being, and also another relatively large running event that was planned for this coming weekend. Some local festivals have been postponed, and on a national scale, the Two Oceans Marathon will now not take place over the Easter weekend. Park Runs are also cancelled. What we also need is for people to restrict their social interaction with others, stop going to restaurants, shop less frequently, not take their children to malls, play parks and other gatherings during the holidays, and start to take this outbreak seriously. The consequences of not doing so are potentially disastrous for the country.

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