Plenary

COVID-19: 2020 VISION

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Several months into 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was described as a wake-up call regarding the risk of a novel coronavirus pandemic. In fact, SARS-CoV-2 was that pandemic virus, and the pandemic was already underway.

Australia responded comparatively quickly and effectively with detection of the initial community incursions by SARS-CoV-2, and standing-up a coordinated national laboratory response. The scale of testing undertaken since then has been unprecedented. It has entailed some unique challenges, such

as supply chain insecurity, workplace restrictions, and support for quarantine hotel isolation through high-frequency testing of staff and isolated travellers. Innovative approaches have been required.

The application and scale-up of some emerging technologies and technical approaches have been fast-tracked, including viral genomics, sample pooling, and saliva-based surveillance testing. The development and roll-out of vaccines has been an enormous technical achievement, and offers hope for mitigation. However, the potential threat posed by unexpected amounts of virus mutation, producing so-called 'variants of concern', remains as yet imperfectly understood.

I believe that we can be guardedly optimistic about the future in Australasia, however there is as yet much road to be travelled.