

Australian Medical Association Limited

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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Nine, *Today with Karl Stefanovic and Allison Langdon*, Monday, 3 August 2020

Subject: Victorian Stage 4 lockdown; AMA Presidency

KARL STEFANOVIC: Well, Victoria plunged into six weeks of a Stage 4 lockdown, but will six weeks be enough to control this outbreak?

ALLISON LANGDON: The newly appointed President of the Australian Medical Association joins us now, Dr Omar Khorshid. A very good morning to you, Omar. Would you have liked to see this action taken earlier? Your predecessor, Dr Tony Bartone, thought so.

OMAR KHORSHID: Good morning. There's no doubt that if more had been done early in this outbreak in Victoria, that we may not be in the situation we're in now. But the critical thing is, the tough decision has been made, and it's time for all Victorians to do the right thing and keep apart, because that's the only way we can stop this virus in its tracks.

KARL STEFANOVIC: When you look at New South Wales, and to a lesser extent Queensland, what are your thoughts on restrictions, tighter restrictions in those States?

OMAR KHORSHID: The health system is working hard to do really good contact tracing and keep the outbreak to a very small number of people, and to limit the need for restrictions for the whole community, but what we've learnt from Victoria is you can't lose track. You can't let this virus get ahead of you.

ALLISON LANGDON: I tell you what, listening to Brett Sutton, the Chief Health Officer, over the weekend in Victoria, he was talking about the breakdown of cases, and 53 per cent of people testing positive are in this age gap of between 15 and 40 years. Did that surprise you?

OMAR KHORSHID: We know that this virus is carried by lots of people in the community who don't actually know they've got it. And, early on in the pandemic, we saw elderly people getting very sick and we thought that they were really the group that were carrying the virus.

But the reality is, and the reason it's spreading so fast through Victoria, is that young people are catching the virus. They may not get terribly sick, unfortunately some do, but it's those people who don't get sick, who don't know they've got symptoms, who are spreading it through the community. And the reality for any Victorian is, you don't know if the person next to you is actually carrying the virus and not knowing.

KARL STEFANOVIC: And the reality too, the hard reality, is you don't know how it's going to react in individuals, right?

OMAR KHORSHID: That's absolutely right. We've seen some young people severely ill and unfortunately, we will see young healthy people die during this pandemic, and it just underlines the importance of getting this right, and for every Victorian to swallow this bitter pill that they've been asked to swallow. And the thoughts, I think, of the rest of country are with them. But if we get it right, we can beat it. We've done it before.

ALLISON LANGDON: Well, look, congratulations on the appointment, by the way, too. You were appointed President of the AMA over the weekend. I tell you what, what a time to come into the top job.

OMAR KHORSHID: It certainly is, but it underlines the importance of a strong voice from the medical profession. We know we're a trusted voice in the community, and I'm certainly going to do my bit to make sure that the views of the medical profession are heard by government, and that they're heard by the public, and that we get through this crisis as quickly and as safely as we can.

KARL STEFANOVIC: You know the frontline medical services are under the pump. I mean, what do you say to them right now?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, it's hard to even put into words the stress that doctors are going through, particularly in hot spots like the Royal Melbourne Hospital, but what we can do as a community is heed the advice that has been given. Follow the rules, because if you do that, you will protect the healthcare workers. You will protect the hospitals so that they're there to look after you when you're sick, and most importantly, you're going to protect the rest of the country.

ALLISON LANGDON: I tell you what, it's a tough six weeks ahead but our thoughts are with everyone in Melbourne and wider Victoria right now. Hopefully it makes a difference. Thank you for joining us.

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