Foreword

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The COVID-19 pandemic demands the best disaster-response. A smart, careful, efficient, well-controlled and organized approach is needed to win the battle against this destructive force of nature. This approach lies at the core of the field of surgery. Globally, surgeons are daily confronted with challenges that need a direct, pragmatic, well-balanced, cost-beneficial and intelligent solution. Although the first focus of the coronavirus is the lungs, with pneumologists, virologists, and infectious disease and ICU specialists in the first line, COVID patients also deserve the best surgical care. Adaptations in surgical locations (designated COVID operating areas), dedicated transport and patient flow, specific operating room preparations, environmental sanitization and the safest personnel protective equipment (PPE) are today key for all specialists in surgical care, and some of the articles in this edition will highlight these necessary changes.

At the same time, a pressing and disturbing development needs to be urgently addressed. An unfortunate collateral victim of the COVID-19 virus is the lack of adequate medical care for patients suffering from acute and chronic ‘non-COVID’ (surgical) diseases. Abscess growth leading to vascular and orthopedic prosthesis, deteriorated critical limb ischemia resulting in major amputations, perforated appendicitis with life-threatening peritonitis, ventricular aneurysm formation post-AMI, non-diagnosed fractures, and missed strokes have all been reported in current surgical practice.

Immense fear, bordering on panic, not only deters patients from actively seeking medical care, but also appears to have impacted the readiness and willingness of referring doctors and hospitals to make modern surgical care available. Many hospitals, large and small, in both the private and public sectors, have closed their outpatient departments and restricted their inpatient facilities to COVID-care.

Surgeons are creative in the manner in which they will handle these serious problems. Their leadership in close interactions with first-line medical staff, authorities, healthcare providers and professional organizations will inform, warn and convince people to have a global view. Their dedicated strategies to offer efficient and safe surgical care to all patients will make the difference. Their perseverance will avoid more collateral damage to non-COVID patients. Their flexibility and willingness to “pick up and do whatever needs to be done” will help everybody. I’m proud to be one of them.

It is also highly appreciated that the surgical community continues to provide scientific contributions. Even during this unprecedented challenge, outstanding studies and discussions in general, colorectal, cardiovascular, gynecological, orthopedic and neurosurgery are available, as highlighted in this 36th edition of STI. Science remains the base of our daily practice. Keep it safe, keep it healthy: plus est en vous.