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I Take Hydroxychloroquine. Please Don't Hoard It.

To prevent hoarding and protect public health, we need to move towards universal care and lower-cost drugs.

by [Olivia Alperstein](#)

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Empty drug store shelves in Phoenix, Arizona shortly after quarantine measures were announced. (Photo: Shutterstock)

The best birthday present I got this year was a refill of my medication. Ordinarily, that wouldn't be much to celebrate, but the coronavirus has upended the ordinary.

I've been taking hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug, since I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at 22. Thankfully, it's kept my disease from progressing. It's not an exaggeration to say it's the only reason I don't need a cane right now.

When I saw that [chloroquine was being touted by President Trump and others](#) as a potential treatment for the coronavirus, my heart sank. I counted the pills I had left and called my doctor.

Thankfully, I'm still getting my medication — for now.

[It isn't clear yet whether chloroquine is an effective treatment for COVID-19.](#) There aren't any definitive studies to prove it — in fact, a study in Brazil had to be [halted](#) over



Some hospitals are stockpiling the drug in advance, while some people who haven't tested positive — and who don't need the drug for other medical reasons — are trying to get their hands on a supply.

As a result, I'm not the only person worrying about getting access to this life-saving medication.

Thousands upon thousands of people around the world rely on it, both to treat rheumatoid arthritis and to control malaria outbreaks. Imagine what it's like for them watching otherwise healthy people try to stock up on this drug like they're rushing to scoop up toilet paper.

Due to high costs, people already ration much-needed medications even in the best of times. And now, in a crisis, drug companies are angling to capitalize on this pandemic.

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Drug maker Gilead, for example, sought — and received — a monopoly from the FDA to produce a promising coronavirus treatment, which would have surely put it out of reach for millions. The company [only backed down](#) after intense public pressure.

Before the outbreak, drug manufacturer Rising Pharmaceuticals had decided to double the price of Plaquenil, the brand-name version of hydroxychloroquine, but the company [temporarily suspended the price hike](#). How nice of them.



Some US senators were concerned with being stockpiled than protecting the public. It feels very vulnerable to rely on a life-saving medication at a time like this.

Anyone needing treatment for this virus should get it. But that also means we need to protect others who rely on drugs like chloroquine from the hoarding and price gouging that could put our medications out of reach, too.

No one — from coronavirus patients to people with conditions like mine — should feel like they need to hoard drugs to feel safe, or be deprived of access to drugs they need to survive.

If you are generally healthy, there's something you can do to give people like me a fighting chance: Demand that Congress put people's health first in the next coronavirus stimulus package. Call on them to require insurers to eliminate patient costs associated with treating the disease.

And call on them to move toward universal health care and lower-cost prescription drugs for all ailments.

I am incredibly lucky. Many people with rheumatoid arthritis have far worse symptoms than I and were first diagnosed later in life, when they may have developed other complications. These are people who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

We have already lost too many people to this pandemic, and we will lose more. It's more urgent than ever that we act to protect public health.



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