

## Population health vs personalized medicine? Coronavirus pandemic highlights the importance of multiple approaches

“If we are to advance health care in the United States, where is the dollar best spent? Is it spent on hypergranular individual solutions or is it best spent on large-scale public health ventures?” says Jeffrey Henderson, associate professor of medicine and microbiology at Washington University School of Medicine.

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The Covid-19 pandemic has now highlighted a rival perspective in the debate. The key strategies for containing the pandemic—hand washing, better hygiene, quarantines, social distancing and contact tracing—have been successfully deployed in previous outbreaks going back more than a century. Vaccines, which take longer to deploy, are also a public-health standby.

All of these approaches are low tech, available relatively quickly and applicable to the general population. At a time of pandemic, focus on common rather than individual solutions has taken precedence.

So it makes sense that the first national initiative launched to try to treat today’s severely ill patients is the National Covid-19 Convalescent Plasma Project... The project is designed to buy time and save lives until a vaccine can be developed and deployed or more targeted therapies can be identified and tested.

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After the pandemic, [professor Nathaniel Comfort] said, it might be time to think about the debate in a different way. “The precision medicine and one-size-fits-all approaches have always been framed as opposites, as antagonists,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be that way. The problem that stands before us now is how do we change that?”

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