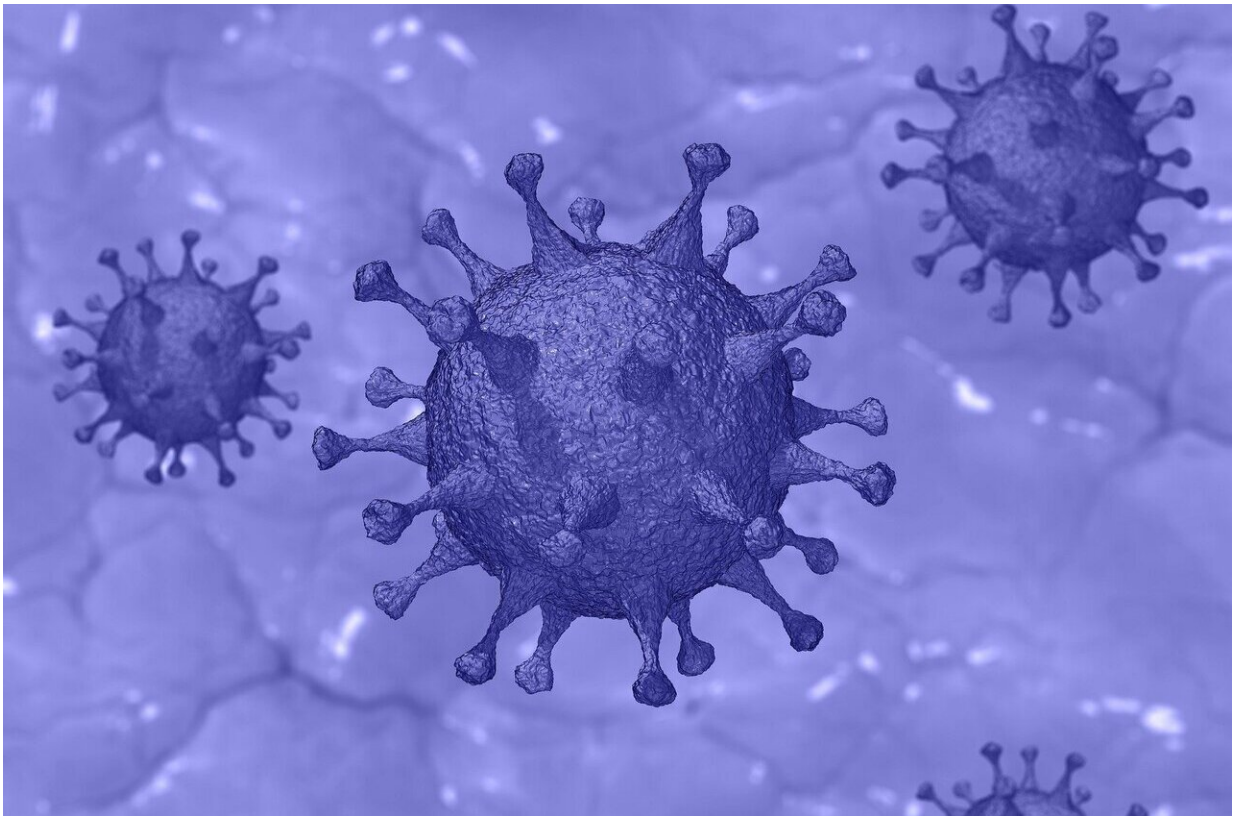


Nobel laureates say 'political will' needed to end virus outbreaks

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Technological advancements and international cooperation have accelerated scientific understanding of COVID-19 but it will take political will to end virus outbreaks, the new Nobel laureates in medicine

said Monday.

Americans Charles Rice of The Rockefeller University and Harvey Alter of the National Institutes of Health were honored along with Briton Michael Houghton for the discovery of the Hepatitis C virus.

In separate press conferences, the laureates noted how long it had taken them to achieve their results.

"It is a long story, kind of a 50 years saga," said 85-year-old Alter who began his research in the 1960s.

But they added how technological improvements now meant quicker results.

"There is a big difference between the 1970s and '80s and now. The technology is so advanced it's astounding," he added.

Rice, 68, said it took them "months and months of toil to sequence a single viral genome."

"Now people can do that in a matter of hours. And the rate at which people have been able to make progress on understanding... COVID-19 is just spectacular," he added.

For Houghton these [technological advancements](#), especially in the development of vaccines, are the "silver behind the lining of the COVID cloud."

Rice said global scientific cooperation in response to the [coronavirus](#) pandemic was "reassuring" for battles against future viruses.

He added it had changed "the way that science is done to really make it

more of a community effort rather than something that years ago might have been pursued by a few labs in isolation."

Alter said though that the rush to find cures should not come at the expense of proper research.

"You need to have long-range planning, long-range thinking, and the freedom to pursue things that don't have an immediate effect. And nowadays if you don't have an endpoint it's hard to get funding," he added.

Alter said the science of Hepatitis C, which kills about 400,000 people every year, is now such that better testing and drugs are not required.

"What we need is the political will to eradicate it," he added.

Alter said the same needed to be done for COVID-19.

"The kind of things that needs to be done mainly is to test and treat. If we had a great rapid test for COVID and a great treatment for COVID, it would be the same, the same principle," he said.

Houghton added that it was also necessary to respect basic health rules.

"It is disconcerting when you see not everyone doing what you know as a virologist makes sense, which is to socially distancing and wear a mask and so forth," he said.

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