

BRAVERY & TRUTH from the FRONT LINES of the PANDEMIC

CNN CHIEF MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT DR. SANJAY GUPTA RECEIVES
THE PRESS CLUB'S PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR IMPACT ON MEDIA

BY ALEX
BEN BLOCK

On March 9, 2020, the same day that then-President Donald Trump was tweeting that the coronavirus was no worse than the flu, Dr. Sanjay Gupta published an essay on CNN.com declaring that henceforth the global news network would refer to the virus cutting across the U.S., and much the world, as a "pandemic."

"It is not a decision we take lightly," wrote Gupta, who by then had been CNN's chief medical correspondent for two decades. "While we know it sounds alarming, it should not cause panic."

Looking back 18 months later, Gupta said he knew it was going to be "frightening to some

people and politically charged for other people."

The phrasing immediately drew blasts from Trumpworld. Don Jr. cited it as an example of the fake news media. On March 11, President Trump assured Republican senators, "We're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away."

Why did Gupta stick his neck out?

"To call it a pandemic felt momentous and weighty," he recalled later. "We didn't want to panic people—but we felt we had to call it what it was and so we did that."

What Gupta did took courage because many in government, business and the media worried that calling the coronavirus a pandemic would cause panic. It is for this courage, his continuing efforts to cover the pandemic, and his work to help people understand and deal with the health crisis, that the Los Angeles Press Club is presenting Gupta with the President's Award for Impact on Media at tonight's 63rd annual Southern California Journalism Awards.

"Dr. Gupta used his expertise to help audiences understand an unprecedented health crisis, providing vital information to guide decisions on how to protect themselves and their families," said Press Club President Lisa Richwine.

Gupta's CNN colleague Anderson Cooper is among those who are impressed and inspired by the doctor's work.

"He is brilliant, brave, and even in the midst of chaos, calm and reasoned," said Cooper. "During this pandemic he has helped hundreds

of millions of people around the world protect themselves and their families, and he continues to work tirelessly to help all of us understand this ever-changing virus."

While continuing to serve as a physician, medical school professor and neurosurgeon based in Atlanta, where he lives with his lawyer wife and three daughters, Gupta has been on the front lines of world health issues since joining CNN in 2001.

He has reported on anthrax attacks, and from

Iraq and Kuwait. He covered a tsunami in Sri Lanka, Hurricane Katrina, and wars in Lebanon and Afghanistan. He was on the ground for earthquakes in Haiti, flooding in Pakistan, oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico and many other disasters.

COVID-19 is not his first pandemic. Gupta was in Guinea to report on Ebola, in Canada to cover the SARS outbreak, and in the Middle East reporting on MERS.

In recent years, his focus has shifted to long-form reporting, including hosting the CNN series "Chasing Life with Dr. Sanjay Gupta," where he travels the globe searching for the secret to long life, health and happiness. He has made documentaries for HBO, reported for "60 Minutes" on CBS and written four books, most recently *Keep Sharp: Building a Better Brain*.

Still, with COVID-19, Gupta faced one of his greatest challenges.

"Getting the right information out there is so important," he said. "Combatting misinformation is equally important."

"I spent so much time, especially in the first year of this pandemic, battling down misinformation it felt like you could never really get your groove, because every time there was a press conference, you had to spend time explaining what was said and how much of it doesn't fit with everything we know so far."



Above: Anderson Cooper and Gupta in Japan, 2011, after the earthquake and tsunami.

Below: Reporting on the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010 from Bernard Mevs hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Opposite page: Gupta visits a refugee camp in Pakistan.



PRESIDENT'S AWARD
DR. SANJAY GUPTA



Top: While hosting the “Chasing Life With Dr. Sanjay Gupta” series, he found himself at India’s S-VYASA University getting hooked up, and rowing in Norway.

Above: Gupta talks to a cannabis grower in his investigation, “Weed 5: The CBD Craze.”

Right: Traveling with his wife, Rebecca, and their daughters Soleil, Sage, and Sky.

After Trump left office, Gupta interviewed medical experts who worked with the White House. The conversations left him shaken. “You know 600,000 people died,” he said, “and when you hear from these guys that 80%-90% of those deaths were preventable, it’s a reckoning of sorts. I’m really glad journalism exists to be able to fact check and make sure good information is available to people.”

Another person happy about that information is CNN President Jeff Zucker. “For 20 years, Sanjay Gupta has been the primary reason that people all around the world trust CNN for news and information about their health and well-being,” Zucker said. “Clearly these past 18 months have put the work he does in an even more critical spotlight. But the truth is, he has always been there for our audiences.”

Gupta describes himself as a “science



reporter,” not an opinion pundit who can say what he thinks without proof. “It’s often easy to say things that are popular,” said Gupta, “because people want to hear it. It’s the same in medicine. We’d love to tell a patient everything is going to be okay. Patients would love to hear it. But it’s not true.”

Gupta said tonight’s Press Club honor means “a lot” to him. “You know, sitting here, you feel like you are in a bubble and you forget people are even watching,” he said. “So, thank you.” 🙌

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DR. SANJAY GUPTA

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