

“The Lancet” on Nicaragua - Cynical Disinformation Posing as Concern

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Coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic in Nicaragua has become yet one more psy-warfare battleground between supporters of the US government supported right-wing opposition and the country's Sandinista government.

In the UK, “the Lancet” has long been a leading propaganda outlet for supporters of Nicaragua’s right wing political opposition, making a mockery of its status as a leading scientific medical journal. In 2018, it published two propaganda articles supporting the proponents of that year’s violent failed opposition coup attempt.: [“Criminalisation of health care in Nicaragua’s political crisis”](#) and [“The Politicised and crumbling Nicaraguan health system”](#).

The context of the lies, distortions and omissions in those propaganda articles has been broadly addressed [here](#) and [here](#) and also elsewhere on specific issues such as: [violent damage to health infrastructure](#) along with [opposition attacks on hospitals](#) and the [health system’s experience of the coup attempt](#). More generally, Nicaragua’s health system has been highly praised internationally for its vaccination programs, its epidemiological work against mosquito borne diseases and for its maternal care programs that have dramatically cut maternal mortality rates since 2007.

However, rather than acknowledging the undeniable successes and advances of Nicaragua’s public health system and hospital infrastructure, the Lancet’s editors have decided to continue unjustified defamation of Nicaragua’s public health system with another deceitful hit piece called [“Love in the time of COVID-19: negligence in the Nicaraguan response”](#). The article’s authors lazily repeat false opposition propaganda from US government funded opposition propaganda outlets like [Confidencial](#).

They make no attempt to source possible contradictory evidence or views, preferring to write the same kinds of lies, misrepresentations and omissions that have become standard practice now in practically all Western reporting on Nicaragua. For a true picture of Nicaragua’s response to the COVID-19 epidemic, [this article](#) and also [this one](#) offer a strong, well-sourced antidote to the Lancet’s venomous falsehoods. The first lie in this latest Lancet article is that the Nicaraguan government’s response to the COVID-19 epidemic has been erratic.

To the contrary, the health authorities have been the most consistent, determined and serious in the whole region in terms of coordination with the World Health Organization, with other countries and with regional authorities like the Central American Integration System, in terms of applying protocols appropriate to national social and economic realities,

preparation of infrastructure and material resources, education policy and preventive mobilization of hundreds of thousands of health workers and volunteer health promoters. All this has been thoroughly reported in multiple local news media whose reports the Lancet has chosen to omit.

The second lie the Lancet falsely asserts is that “contradicting mitigation strategies recommended by WHO, President Daniel Ortega has refused to encourage any physical distancing measures”. In fact from the very outset of the health alert in February the government has stressed proper handwashing, taking care to protect others when sneezing or coughing and keeping a physical distance of at least 1.5 metres as well as carefully cleaning constantly-used surfaces. People wanting to self-isolate have been free to do so, including school and university students. Even so, the Lancet has chosen to omit this reality or to note any of the abundant printed and audio-visual educational material that has proliferated in Nicaragua especially since February.

The Lancet article makes great play of the projected estimates of the [Health Ministry's Protocol](#) for addressing the COVID-19 epidemic produced in February, but fails to acknowledge that this self-same document of over 50 pages of detailed analysis and exposition makes nonsense of the article's opening claim and central argument that Nicaragua has been unprepared, erratic and negligent in addressing the epidemic. The Lancet states that the Protocol's projected statistical estimates suggest the possibility of up to 813 fatalities, with possibly up to 1016 patients needing intensive care and the Lancet again cites the Confidential opposition propaganda outlet, this time reporting that Nicaragua does not have enough ventilators to attend that number of patients.

Confidential's claim of a serious lack of ventilators is unsourced hearsay typical of opposition propaganda in Nicaragua, but the Lancet uses it anyway. However, in the first place, Nicaragua's health authorities have [clearly planned a strategy](#) to spread out the number of any possible infections so that should the virus spread then affected patients will not all need attention in the country's health system at once. Secondly, the health authorities are coordinating the resources of the public health system with all health care institutions in Nicaragua, including the well resourced private sector hospitals, the country's Social Security health care system and the Nicaraguan army's superbly equipped health facilities. The Lancet omits that crucial fact.

The Lancet goes on to express approval of neighboring countries like Honduras and El Salvador that have much worse health, social and economic outcomes to date in terms of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The populations in both those countries are suffering acute economic hardship as a result of the suppression model applied there. This is in sharp contrast to the relative economic normality in Nicaragua, where the outcomes of its mitigation and monitoring model are undeniably optimal so far, given the overall context. But the scientific geniuses at the Lancet want the same failed policies adopted by its neighbors to be applied to people in Nicaragua.

In the end, the Lancet does finally get one thing right when the article states “This situation underscores the need for resource-limited countries to focus on early prevention and containment efforts as their main strength in the fight against COVID-19.” And that is exactly what the Nicaraguan authorities have done in the most successful way. To date, they have prevented the COVID-19 virus from breaking out into the general population and have successfully contained it.

Nicaragua is the only country in Central America that has mobilized its health workers and volunteer health promoters to undertake over 2.3 million house-to-house visits educating people and monitoring the development of the COVID-19 virus. One might speculate that what aggravates the Lancet and its writers so much is that impoverished Nicaragua's community health care model has so far made rich-country health systems look disorganized and inadequate. That hypothesis is certainly more scientific than the Lancet's driveline in support of Nicaragua's right wing opposition.

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