

Barbaric experiments with “COVID-19 drug kit” killed hundreds in Brazil

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Last Saturday, a *GI* report was published showing that the private health insurance provider, Prevent Senior, was involved in a sinister experiment in March-April 2020, secretly medicating hundreds of COVID-19 elderly patients with hydroxychloroquine and erythromycin without their knowledge, resulting in the deaths of at least nine people.

The report showed a company director, Fernando Okinawa, in a WhatsApp group explicitly demanding that medical staff hide their prescriptions of a combination of hydroxychloroquine and erythromycin from patients. Meanwhile, cardiologist Rodrigo Ester, Okinawa and others distorted the patients’ data, erasing information on the deaths of seven out of nine patients, to publish a paper promoting the drugs as effective treatment for COVID-19 patients. With these alterations, they could claim that no one died when using their “early treatment.”

The report about the macabre experiment was published after the Brazilian Senate’s inquiry commission (CPI) on Bolsonaro’s handling of the pandemic received a formal complaint in late August signed by 15 doctors stating that a deal was made between the Bolsonaro government and the company to distribute medications of the so-called “COVID-19 kit,” which includes hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin and other unproven or since discredited medications. The doctors’ complaint also described how they were forced not to use masks to “disseminate” the virus among patients who would be used as “human guinea pigs.”

Last Thursday, the complaint was substantiated by a leak of medical records of patients. Another executive director from Prevent Senior, Pedro Benedito Batista Jr., was called by the CPI to testify on the revelations.

A resemblance of this episode to the barbaric eugenic experiments undertaken by the Nazis was promptly recognized. Comments were made in the media making references to Josef Mengele, a Nazi SS officer who coordinated horrific experiments on camp prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Second World War.

The disturbing nature of these practices was made even

clearer this Wednesday during a CPI session with Batista, when it was revealed that Anderson Nascimento, a former Prevent Senior director, made regular references to the SS themes of “obedience and loyalty” and tried to promote them inside the company. He was discretely removed from the company in 2017 and now works in the even bigger Hapvida, a health insurance provider for 4.8 million people.

Workers Party (PT) Senator Rogério Carvalho said during the session that he had received information that Prevent Senior went through the social network profiles of their employees looking to fire “left party” sympathizers and followers of groups critical of the Bolsonaro government.”

Far from being an exception, the episode is “only the tip of the iceberg,” stated Bruna Morato, the lawyer representing the doctors at Prevent Senior. On Wednesday, Morato revealed that hundreds of patients died as a result of the “experiments” carried out by the company until April 2021. In fact, an April report by *GI*, Prevent Senior doctors recounted being forced to continue going to work after being diagnosed with COVID-19 and prescribe “COVID-19 kits” for patients without the consent of their families. Hospital coordinators threatened to fire doctors who refused to prescribe kits and enforced informal quotas for kit prescriptions.

Director Batista, who himself became a target of the CPI investigation after his testimony on Wednesday, expressed the apparent regularity with which fascist-minded individuals are taken under the wing of the company and put in administrative positions. In one tweet, he encouraged doctors to “test as much as possible,” meaning to use unproven or discredited medications for COVID-19 treatment to “test” the response of elderly people.

The data distortions themselves were not isolated to the company’s macabre experiment, but adopted as part of its general protocols. Company officials oriented medical staff in WhatsApp groups to alter patient charts for those diagnosed with COVID-19 14 or 21 days after the beginning of their symptoms, removing them from the COVID-19 case list. Such a blatant distortion would allow the company to

declare a higher rate of successful treatment for COVID-19 cases by shifting the cause of death for those patients who died after the two or three week period to kidney failure, heart failure, or any other complications which are expected in severe COVID-19 cases.

The demand that doctors prescribe COVID-19 treatments without scientific evidence is not isolated to Prevent Senior. A doctor from Hapvida in the state of Ceará stated anonymously that “It is known by all doctors who work in the clinical staff of [Ceará’s capital] Antônio Prudente Hospital that there is pressure to prescribe the [COVID-19] kit.” According to a report by *Repórter Brasil*, both companies continued to force medical staff to prescribe hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin and other unproven or discredited medications to their patients at least until April of this year, while archiving multiple complaints by doctors who refused to prescribe the medications to their patients.

Bolsonaro promotes Prevent Senior’s unapproved human trials

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro has been at the center of an anti-scientific campaign to justify the full reopening of the economy without any restraints on the virus’s spread. He aggressively promoted the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 throughout the pandemic.

In April 2020, the fascistic president, his family members and a federal attorney close to the president, Ailton Benedito, started promoting the Prevent Senior pre-print article on Twitter days after it was published. Bolsonaro also received the company director Batista during a live meeting to promote false COVID-19 treatments.

A video obtained by *Metrópoles* shows Batista stating he shares Prevent Senior medical data “all the time” with the federal government. Meanwhile, one of Bolsonaro’s medical advisors, Paolo Zanotto, helped the company in developing its COVID-19 medical protocols.

At the time, the president’s anti-scientific declarations in favor of discredited drugs to treat COVID-19 patients were already a critical component of his campaign to cultivate a far-right movement. His Twitter post promoting the Prevent Senior study was published one day before a fascist rally outside the Army headquarters in Brazil’s capital, in which he appeared demanding the shutdown of Congress and the Supreme Court for supporting partial shutdowns of economic activities to contain the pandemic decreed by governors and mayors.

That such barbaric experiments were imposed on multiple hospitals can only be described as an appalling crime against humanity.

The use of “COVID-19 kits” was systematically enforced by Prevent Senior without the consent of thousands of families and with direct support from President Bolsonaro. Ominously, this barbaric experiment on the elderly was directly defended by this same president at the United Nations.

Demonstrating his readiness to unabashedly continue a deliberate policy of herd immunity through mass infection, Bolsonaro defended “early treatments” during the opening session of the UN General Assembly and suggested he would not finance any more vaccine purchases after November. This was five days after *Globo*’s Prevent Senior report exposed the barbaric experiments on the elderly. On Tuesday, the president’s cabinet sent suggestions of questions for Wednesday’s CPI session with Batista, which would promote the advantages of “early treatments.”

When the company’s “study” was made during March-April of 2020 and published as a pre-print version, it was soon retracted by the National Research Ethics Commission (Conep). The clinical trials with human subjects had been completed without ever receiving approval to even start. Since then, Bolsonaro has never recognized their ethical implications, much less apologized. Quite the opposite, he continued and doubled down on his campaign against lockdowns and in favor of “early treatments.”

The fascistic ideology being developed under Bolsonaro’s open herd immunity policy finds its breeding ground in the diseased state of the capitalist system in Brazil and internationally and the criminal response of the world’s ruling classes to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Around the world, millions of children are being sent back to schools with the expected consequence that they will be infected, develop “Long COVID” and other symptoms and die in mass. In the UK, the Boris Johnson administration sent 10 million children back to school even as its deputy Chief Medical Officer stated, “I think it’s quite inevitable that they will be [infected] at some point.”

The struggle against the mass death policies imposed by capitalism in response to COVID-19 and the fascistic tendencies growing in different countries requires a fight by the international working class to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society.



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