

Cartoonist Sonny Liew teams up with doctor to produce comic strips on coronavirus



Graphic novelist Sonny Liew (above) worked with Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang, the programme leader for infectious diseases at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, to produce the comic strips. PHOTOS: SONNY LIEW, ST FILE

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SINGAPORE - Singapore's award-winning graphic novelist Sonny Liew has worked with Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang, the programme leader for infectious diseases at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, to produce a series of comic strips to educate the public about the coronavirus outbreak.

One comic strip, which brings home the message that you should wear a mask if you are unwell, was released last week on social media.

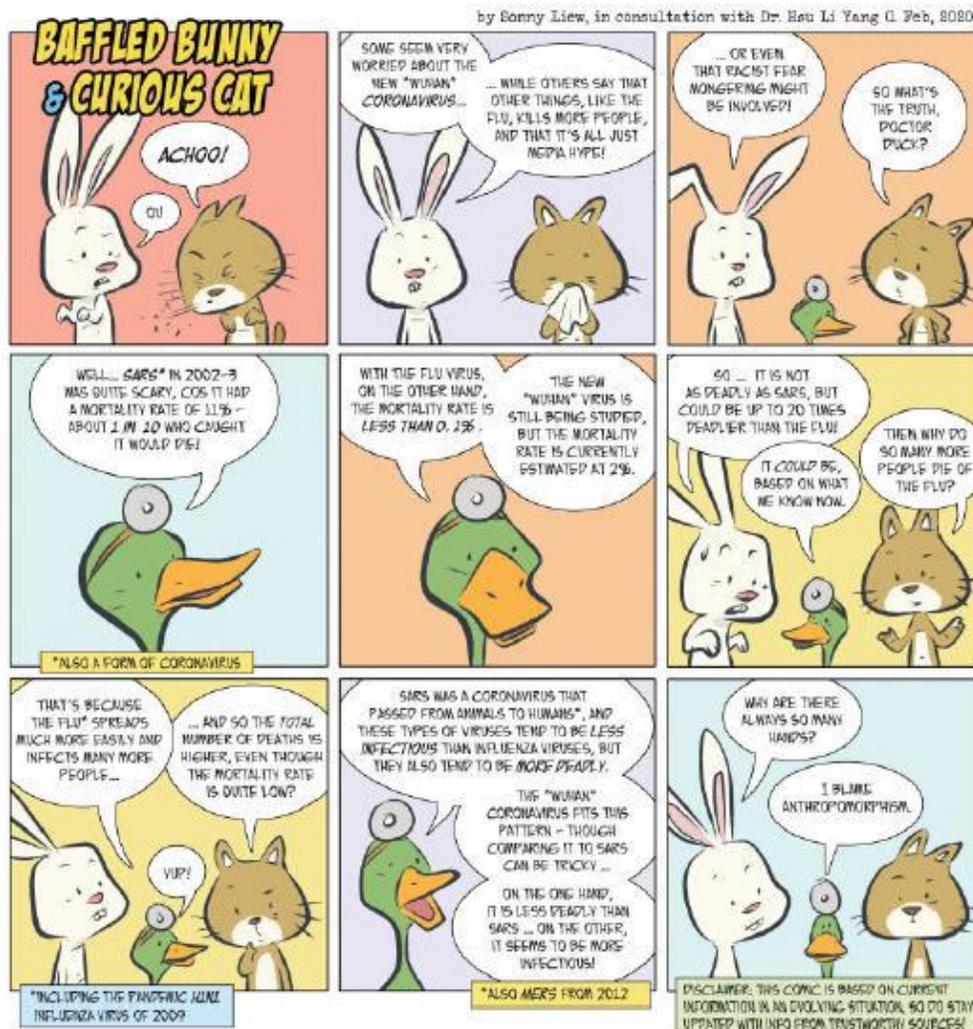
Another one, the first in the series of comic strips, dispels the mistaken belief that influenza is more deadly than this virus.

The erroneous view is based on the absolute number of deaths, without accounting for the total number of infections.

The flu spreads more easily and infects more people, so the total number of deaths is higher but the mortality rate is lower. In the comic strip, Dr Duck tells Baffled Bunny and Curious Cat that Sars was "quite scary" because it had a mortality rate of 11 per cent - about one in 10 who caught it would die.

"With the flu virus, on the other hand, the mortality rate is less than 0.1 per cent," says Dr Duck. The new coronavirus is still being studied, but the mortality rate is estimated at 2 per cent, say experts.

Prof Hsu said they chose the topic as they felt it was important to help people understand that this coronavirus is different from the Sars, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, virus.



One comic strip dispels the mistaken belief that influenza is more deadly than this virus. PHOTO: SONNY LIEW



Supported by SPHERIC (NHS/05/0026/2017_NUHS)

Another comic strip brings home the message that you should wear a mask if you are unwell. PHOTO: SONNY LIEW

For one thing, Sars did not spread much in the community.

"The number of confirmed cases of this new virus is far higher than Sars in a much shorter period of time, notwithstanding the impact that the annual migration just before the Chinese New Year period might have had," said Prof Hsu.

"However, the proportion of infected people who are critically ill and who have died is also far lower than Sars. Hence it appears to be more infectious than Sars but less deadly."

"It is important to note that human coronaviruses are pretty infective but cause only the common cold, while the two prior animal coronaviruses that have made the leap to humans - Sars and Mers - have generally transmitted less well and are more deadly. This coronavirus 2019-nCoV seems to fall in between the two extremes."

Mr Liew, the author of the award-winning *The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, said they plan to do more comic strips on the coronavirus.

"I hope that the comics can play a small role in bringing some clarity to some of the issues in this outbreak in an accessible manner, he said.

The duo are already thinking about upcoming topics. "We aim to explore the concepts of how Covid-19 spreads, the uncertainties surrounding the risk of death from infection and potential future scenarios in the next series of strips," said Prof Hsu.

Last year, the two collaborated on a graphic novel titled *The Antibiotic Tales*, which explains how microbes evolve and resist the drugs used to kill them.

Have a question on the coronavirus outbreak? E-mail us at askst@sph.com.sg
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