

ANDREW MARR SHOW, DR ANGELIQUE COETZEE, 28th November, 2021

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Dr Angelique Codetzee

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AM: Around the world scientists are pouring over every single scrap of new data about the variant causing such concern. Earlier this morning I spoke to two people on the front line of that research. Dr Paul Burton, the Medical Director of the vaccine maker Moderna, who as he told me, is already working on a new booster for Omicron, but first to Dr Angelique Coetzee, Chair of the South African Medical Association and the doctor who spotted this first.

A: What happened is round about the 18th of November I all of a sudden encountered you know unusual symptoms with actually started with a male patient that's around the age of 33, 31 round about. And I never, you know, very seldom visit the surgery and it seemed to me it was extremely tired for the past two days and he's got this body aches and pains with a bit of a headache. Not really sore throat, more a scratchy type of description and no cough and no loss of smell or taste. And because it's unusual for that specific person to present with type of symptoms I decided to test. We do rapid testing in our surgeries and it was positive. I then tested the rest of his family and it was all positive. Every one of them very, very mild symptoms and that is what you call mild symptoms. And then for the rest of the day I actually saw more patients coming in with the same sort of symptoms that all tested positive. I alerted the Advisory Committee of the Minister on the vaccines because I'm part of that committee and that's why it's easy for me to say to them, listen, something is wrong. I have seen today a picture that doesn't fit in with Delta and then the beginning of this past week it came out that this is the new variant going around. So what we are seeing clinically in South Africa and remember, I'm at the epicentre, that's where I'm practising, is extremely mild. For us that's mild cases. We haven't

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admitted anyone. I spoke to other colleagues of mine, the same picture.

AM: So do you think that we in Britain, in the United States, in Israel, in Europe, do you think we're all panicking unnecessarily?

A: I think you already have it there in your country. You're not even knowing it. And I would say yes, at this stage I would say definitely. Two weeks from now on maybe we will say something different.

AM: You suggested just a moment ago that it may be seeded in the UK already some way back and we may simply not have not noticed.

A: Yes. Definitely, because you are seeing a lot of Delta cases. Remember we had the break. We had about 8 to 10 weeks break between our last wave and this new variant coming onto the market now and so for us to easily see there's something different, it's easy. Your doctors might be more focused on the Delta symptoms and missing this because it's easy to miss this. If it wasn't for the fact that we had not seen the really Covid cases this past few weeks we would have also missed it.

AM: That was very very interesting. Dr Coetzee thank you so much for talking to us.