

## National Press Foundation honors Dr. Sanjay Gupta for his coverage of COVID-19

*Dr. Gupta shares his 'lessons learned' from the past year*

MARY KORR  
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

One year ago this month, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization used the word “pandemic” to describe the spread of COVID-19; two days



prior it was the term CNN chief medical correspondent **DR. SANJAY GUPTA** used on the air.

At the National Press Foundation’s (NPF) Awards Celebration, held virtually on Feb. 18th, Dr. Gupta, a practicing neurosurgeon, was among the honorees, and received the Chairman’s Citation award for 2020. “Sanjay Gupta’s ability to translate the complexity, nuance and art of medicine to make it understandable for a broad audience has made him the nation’s doctor,” said NPF Chair Donna Leinwand Leger. He was recognized for his “tireless and distinguished coverage of COVID-19.”

In brief remarks following the presentation, Dr. Gupta, speaking from his home in Atlanta, described life during the pandemic. “We’re living in a bubble – all of us. When it’s data, facts and evidence, it’s easier to be sure what we are reporting, telling patients, or family, but it is challenging when we are dealing with uncertainty, and when demand for information is immediate. What do you do then?”

### Lessons learned: Humility, honesty and hope

He cited his three “lessons learned” during the pandemic. “Humility is always important. Sometimes there’s a desire to think of science and expect certainty. It’s clearly harder to describe what you don’t know, but you have to be transparent. Remember, COVID is a novel virus – something new,” he said.

“All these firsts make me think about the significance of the word “novel,” he continued. “When was the last time we, as adults and as a society, truly experienced anything for the first time, or have been in a situation for which we had no context?”

He said too often people try to understand a new entity by comparing it to what we already have experienced, looking for patterns. “We have a tendency to put things in a box, as something you

know; but, as in this case, some things are new – and we are not always comfortable with that. We have to be transparent about that, honest. But being honest and direct, and telling people the truth is sometimes hard. I deal with this as a doctor all the time.”

He paraphrased poet, writer and Civil Rights activist, the late Maya Angelou,

**“When was the last time we, as adults and as a society, truly experienced anything for the first time, or have been in a situation for which we had no context?”**

who, among others, said: “It’s not what you say that people remember, but how you made them feel – that’s what people remember.” He said as a communicator and physician, he tries to achieve a balance. “Transparency and honesty must lead the way. Whether you are talking to your patients, or family or a TV audience – find the humanity but be transparent.”

In addition to his work at CNN, Dr. Gupta is the author of “Keep Sharp, Build a Better Brain at Any Age,” a New York Times bestseller. His new book, “World War C: Lessons from the Pandemic and How to Prepare for the Next One,” will be published this fall. He also hosts a podcast: Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction.

Dr. Gupta is an associate professor of neurosurgery at Emory University Hospital and associate chief of neurosurgery at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. He serves as a diplomate of the American Board of Neurosurgery and, in 2019, was elected to the National Academy of Medicine. ❖

