Editor,

COVID-19 and the Swedish Enigma: comparative data show the matter is complex, and the country is average on the European stage

Claeson and Hansen's commentary is critical about the Swedish strategy and points to Sweden as an outlier, given its high mortality as compared to Nordic neighbours.¹ A fair evaluation, however, would include all potential costs versus benefits of the strategy and would make comparisons outside the Nordic region. Sweden is not an outlier compared to European nations, including the UK, many of whom have had tougher public health strategies, including those advocated in the commentary and by WHO¹, and longer lockdowns than those in the Nordic nations.² We examined COVID-19 mortality data in 62 nations globally, using an infection fatality rate model to estimate the proportion of the population in each country that may have been already infected.² Estimates for European nations (as at end December) indicate a range of below 5% to about 20% already infected, with Sweden in the middle both in terms of mortality and spread of infection. Examining the reported daily death rates for Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark Austria and Germany using Worldometer data,³ shows that in Sweden the peak of the second wave did not exceed the peak of the first (with less than a hundred deaths per day). This was also true for Norway and Finland. However, in Denmark, Austria and Germany, countries noted for having exemplary control measures earlier in 2020, the daily numbers have far exceeded the peak of the first wave. We caution about drawing conclusions on the successes and failures of national strategies until the pandemic is over.

Yours sincerely,

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2. Church J BR. COVID-19 Global Mortality: Comparing Actual and Modelled Patterns in Space and Time Using an Infection Fatality Rate (IFR) Model (preprint; not peer-reviewed) SSRN 2020; https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3745174
3. Worldometer. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> (accessed 13th of January 2021).