

Editorial**Corona Pandemic: Lack of Resources but not of determination – A South Asian Perspective**

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We have heard of how the world was affected with smallpox, how millions were affected and died from cholera, how penicillin was a remarkable discovery of the century and how world wars claimed thousands of soldiers from simple wound infection. These were historical events, feared and awed but having no place today in the technologically advanced world of 21st century. Then came a novel corona virus, bringing the world to its knees once again and making us witness to an event that has the potential to change the world again: The Corona Pandemic.⁽¹⁾

Starting from 10th January when the first case was reported in Wuhan, China to the present day, around 9 lakh people have been diagnosed of COVID-19, a new disease caused by a novel corona virus, with almost 200 countries having positive cases.⁽²⁾ Why is this different from the normal influenza epidemics is that it causes a wide range of symptoms and causes a life-threatening illness in patients with advance age, comorbidities or previous respiratory illnesses.⁽³⁾ With US, Italy and Spain surpassing the total cases in china, one wonders how will the developing countries of South Asia cope, with a total population of one third of the world, if the epicenter shifts to one of these countries? Once community spread begins, which is the case in most of the countries now, strict self-isolation and social distancing offers a potential solution to flatten the curve of this pandemic.⁽⁴⁾

In Pakistan, the first case was reported on 25th February in Sindh and now the tally comes up to more than 1700 cases with 21 deaths.⁽²⁾ Pakistan is a high-risk country with respect to its borders with both China, the previous epicenter of this pandemic and Iran, one of the initial countries to become a deadly victim of this virus costing thousands of lives. In India, with 1200 positive cases and 32 deaths as of this writing, the government has taken an unprecedented step of a country wide lockdown of 1.3 billion people to control the spread of this disease.⁽⁵⁾ The situation in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan with 122, 49 and 170 reported cases respectively seems to be under control at the moment, but this could change

anytime.⁽²⁾ With emerging studies on what is the effect of demographic differences, infectivity of different strains of corona virus, immunity status of people, treatment strategies, prospective second wave etc., one can be sure that a lot is unknown. However, the one who is prepared best has the highest chances of mitigating the damage caused by this pandemic.

One of the ignored side effects of this pandemic is the mental health of our population which is in grave danger. Quacks are having a field day with disseminating fake medical advices, bogus therapies for treating this disease and questionable dietary modifications. Our work as a health care professional is to equip ourselves with updated correct knowledge and negate these forward messages on social media vehemently.

Epidemics are not new to Pakistan. Every year, we have a surge of malaria (300,000 to 1 million cases), dengue fever (53,000 cases), H1N1, viral hepatitis and now chikungunya being the latest epidemic.^(6,7) We are also not immune to natural calamities like heat wave, earthquakes, flooding and famine.⁽⁸⁾ The experience of all these disasters should make healthcare professionals at the front foot of managing an epidemic. The world is facing these issues for the first time, but lack of resources is not a new thing for the developing countries. Vaccination trials are being conducted at lightning speed with 32 countries participating in creating the first vaccine but procurement of this vaccine in developing countries on a mass level is beyond the capacity of the developing nations.⁽⁹⁾ The testing kits are being cautiously utilized as these too are few and imported from other countries.⁽¹⁰⁾ Thus, what remains is our defiance in dealing with epidemics with our meagre resources. Our strength lies in our ability to mobilize our large number of healthcare professionals in the best possible manner, use ingenious methods to counter the problem of PPE and specific protocols for testing, and invest on media and public health forums to educate people about prevention. Only through these methods, will we be able to tackle the problem in the best effective manner.

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