

**REFLECTIONS**

**FROM ER**

## Through the red zone

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Working in the emergency department has always been arduous due to all the hustle and bustle, chaos, and rapid turnover of patients. I have always enjoyed it to the fullest, whether it be the morning tea in our conference room, with some clinical and nonclinical small group discussions, or running from one patient to another during the busiest hours. Of course, arguing with the specialties is the most fun part of it.

It was just like any other day when I headed off to the hospital to see everything was upside down.

The emergency department was divided into a red and a green zone because of an actual global emergency that had eventually knocked at our doors. Yes, it was the Corona pandemic. Red zone, where you treated suspected COVID-19 patients, resuscitated them and fought for their lives. This red zone wasn't part of a movie scene; it was real; it was happening. It was shattering to see that, but then there was more.

Seeing everyone else panicking in the hospital was unusual. There was an unknown fear of catching the infection that turned into a delayed disposition of the patients because everyone expected us, the frontline physicians, to have a microscope fitted in our eyes that could instantly screen a patient whether he/she was COVID-19 positive or negative.

Emergency physicians are always criticized for apparently doing nothing regardless of their untiring efforts in the initial stabilization of the patient. This pandemic, however, has turned the tables around. They are being recognized as the heroes of this war; the only ones who volunteer to work at their best in such hostile circumstances. The role is not easy, but it is part of our training to care for everyone that comes through the doors of the emergency department.

Being a part of the red-zone team is thrilling for me, and it's not as dangerous as it sounds (we have been the lucky ones to have PPE provided). Yes, the doctors too have families to care for at home but still, we endanger our lives daily to protect those who depend on us for the best treatment that is available.

Since the lockdown has forced people to stay at home, workload over the past few days is lower than usual, consisting of genuinely sick patients. However, there is going to be an expected increase in the number of people who will be affected by COVID-19. It feels very much like the calm before the storm (though, I hope the exact opposite of it).

So how do I feel?

Yes, I'm scared when the patient coughs or sneezes on me,

While taking nasopharyngeal swabs,

While resuscitating the patient,

While turning the nebulizer or NIV on,

While I'm badly missing my family but can't visit them because of the lockdown,

While I'm sitting alone in my room thinking about how will things be in the next few weeks or months?

But then I remember looking into the eyes of a patient, whom I informed, being positive for COVID-19 and saw the despair, fear, denial, uncertainty, and much more.

"I have kids at home", he said.

“Are they exposed too?”

“Do they need to get tested?”

The shiver in his voice was awakening.

That was the moment I realized none of my fears can overdo his.

I have to be strong; resilient enough to work tirelessly in any area of the emergency department.

I should be determined enough to be able to provide comfort to the patients, who can't even see their family while they are in the hospital and to give them hope, care and support in this critical time.

I can take it as an opportunity to exhibit my skills as this is what I've been trained to do.

This is what drives my whole day in an attire which is hard to breathe through, and I look through the window and remind myself that,

Out beyond this wall,

The sun shines,

The wind blows,

The trees wave,

The bird's chirp,

There's LIFE out there.

In every ray of sunshine,

In every blow of the wind,

In every sound of the birds,

and in every leaf of the trees.

Just hold on a little more,

Just one wall to cross,

That seems bigger than many mountains,

But,

Where there's LIFE, there's HOPE

That's going to make the sun brighter, the wind fresher, the trees greener and the birds musical.

Just hold on a little more.

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