



The COVID-19 Pandemic and our Heroes

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected millions of people across the globe and an equal number of people are at risk of contracting this disease. It has brought life to a standstill with people closing their businesses and adopting social distancing measures. Many countries/cities are under lockdown to contain the disease. To control this situation, the world has come together to combat this disease and return life back to normalcy. While many people are at their homes practicing social distancing, there are a few heroes which include healthcare professionals, law enforcement officers, volunteers etc. This short commentary focuses on the way COVID-19 has shaped the world and salutes its true heroes.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Pandemic, Healthcare Workers, Law Enforcement, Volunteers

INTRODUCTION

A nation can only prosper when different professionals work in tandem and contribute to its growth. A soldier guards the border to protect the citizens of the country from external threats; a farmer helps by providing healthy produce, it is a duty of the healthcare workers (HCWs) to keep the citizens healthy by providing them medical care.

In the face of pandemics, a healthcare worker is the first one to face and report such an outbreak and hence, is at the highest risk of getting infected. Scientific evidence shows that the likelihood of pandemics has increased over the past century and these trends will continue and intensify.¹ Therefore, policies have been made with the need to identify and limit emerging outbreaks that might lead to pandemics and to expand and sustain investment for building preparedness and health capacity.²

The transmission and etiopathogenesis of the viral strain are unknown and hence, its treatment becomes a daunting task. One such example is the sad demise of Dr Li Wenliang, ophthalmologist who was the first person to raise alarm about the coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak, but later lost the fight against the disease.³

As the entire healthcare fraternity mourned the loss of its colleague and people to such a strain, it started preparing for a mammoth task that lied ahead: controlling the spread of the disease. Governments of respective countries came into action and various steps

were taken such as screening of patients at airports and other points of entry.

COVID-19 has become a pandemic beyond control as it has affected millions of people and thousands have lost their life. In response to this, healthcare workers have been working around the clock. The Chinese National Health Commission reported that 3300 health-care workers have been infected as of early March and as per the local media, at least 22 deaths have been reported.

Italy, which is one of the worst affected countries reported that 20% of health-care workers were infected, and some have died. Reports from medical staff describe physical and mental exhaustion, the torment of difficult triage decisions, and the pain of losing patients and colleagues, all in addition to the infection risk.

In USA, which has become the latest epicentre of the disease and has surpassed other countries, the healthcare workers have been facing an unprecedented crisis. At the time this manuscript was prepared, there were 7,40,746 confirmed cases and 39,158 (data updated at time of publication) deaths due to COVID-19.

These healthcare workers are balancing the COVID-19 epidemic between their family and patients. They know that having the highest risk of the disease, any lapse from their end can put their loved ones at risk. On the other hand, it is their moral and social responsibility to



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treat their patients. We can only imagine the stress they must be facing dealing with this horrendous situation. Among HCWs, the risks posed to self and family would be of significant concern about being provided with protective equipment while treating their patients.⁴

While all healthcare workers are the real heroes at this hour of need, a few workers have gone beyond the call of duty for their patients and putting their lives at stake. One such mention is of Dr. Shirin Rouhani, a physician and general practitioner of Shohada Hospital in Iran who was herself on I.V. and still treated patients till her last breath.⁴ Her picture was widely circulated on social media and almost the entire world paid tribute to this real life hero.

Since a vaccine is currently in development and there is no specific treatment for COVID-19, social distancing norms and lockdowns have been implemented. Apart from healthcare workers, the other heroes are the men and women in uniform who are in charge of enforcing the lockdown i.e. law enforcement officers. The success of such measures cannot be possible without the untiring and constant efforts of these officers.

The next category of heroes are the people who have been tirelessly doing volunteer work for those in need. There is a vulnerable section of the society (refugees, migrant workers, aged people, those living in orphanages and old age homes) who cannot survive without the help of these good samaritans. The deadliest cluster in the USA so far has been linked to a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington where more than 20 residents and/or visitors have died. It has been reported that people who lived in other long-term care facilities in Washington, Florida and Kansas contracted the virus and died.

Last but not the least, the people are the heroes who are practising social distancing and staying indoors so that the rapid spread of the virus can be contained.

I salute all our heroes and am confident that post COVID-19, the world shall emerge more resilient and the lessons learnt shall be applied in a manner that future epidemics can be controlled effectively before another pandemic ensues.

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Source of support: Nil, **Conflict of interest:** None declared

Cite this article as:

Yadav R. The COVID-19 Pandemic and our Heroes (Short Commentary). Int Healthc Res J. 2020;4(1):5-6. <https://doi.org/10.26440/IHRJ/0401.04334>

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