COVID-19 – An avoidable epidemic: A family medicine practitioner’s perspective

Sir,

The COVID-19 has been declared as a Global Health emergency by the WHO Emergency Committee. This declaration was based on an increased number of cases being notified from Wuhan, the capital city of Central China’s Hubei province. India has also been a victim of this disease now and as per ICMR COVID-19 update[1] till 10th April 2020, a total of 1,61,330 samples from 1,47,034 individuals were tested. A total of 6782 tests have been confirmed positive among suspected cases or contacts of confirmed cases. Coronavirus has been known to exist in mammals and avian hosts. Coronavirus belongs to family coronaviridae which are single-stranded RNA viruses with a genome size of 26 to 32 kb in size.[2] The recent study based on next-generation sequencing suggests that the COVID-19 virus is 88% identical to already known bat-associated SARS viruses collected in 2018 in Zhoushan, another province of China in 2018.[3] This major route for its spread of infection is from viral droplets and it is propagating throughout the world by international travelers.

At this point, I would bring in your kind attention to my serious observation of a lack of knowledge among travelers. The responsibility has to be owned by the fraternity of family medicine practitioners. Our health system has been made to evolve in such a way that we always tend to overload common man with scientific and nonscientific information, once calamity has already happened. I strongly feel that the role of family medicine practitioners has been always undermined. The bond which has been shared between family physicians and the client family could have played a very pivotal role in preventing such kind infectious pandemics. The contagious nature of the disease, its symptoms, and precautions could have been known to very few initial contacts and positive cases. This exponential rise in several cases could have been prevented. For a country like India, wherein an already overburdened health system is undergoing a radical transfiguration of controlling body i.e. from Medical Council of India to National Medical Commission (NMC). As highlighted in the editorial of a previous issue of this esteemed journal,[4] NMC needs to understand the importance of family medicine and probably a time-bound need for representation of family medicine practitioners for requisite rectifications to include subject as an integral part of undergraduate/postgraduate medical curriculum.[4] The prevailing circumstances of infectious based pandemics and the overflow of factual and fake information specially related to medical conditions, that too during ongoing global emergency needs to be checked and validated. This validation of the continuous flow of information can only be done with the support of family medicine practitioners. The inclusion of family medicine in the curriculum of medical graduate and postgraduate courses will facilitate exposure of students towards this medical field which has been not implemented in India.

It must be emphasized now that many global phenomena of this kind of chaotic and manmade crisis can be prevented by strengthening the holistic practice of family medicine.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

Pranay Tanwar¹, Meenakshi Mourya², Ritesh Kumar³

¹Laboratory Oncology Unit, ²Department of Radiotherapy, Dr. B.R.A. Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, ³Department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. Pranay Tanwar, Laboratory Oncology Unit, Dr. B.R.A. Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi - 110 029, India. E-mail: pranaytanwar@gmail.com

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