Hail the healers in the hell of Covid 19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The condition of the world is different in the year 2021. People who were busy with their daily life and all the social activity have realized that tables can turn over at any moment of time. It’s the COVID-19 pandemic this year. The world has seen the importance of health care workers all around the globe. All the countries have realized the importance of the health care sector along with the need to expand it further. The importance of spending more financially on a country’s health care sector has become utmost important right now. At this time of emergency when humanity is foiling in a way which was never witnessed in the acts of violence against frontline workers, doctors are still not ready to give up on humanity. The human era has witnessed times when people used to laugh out loud about water being sold and now have come to witness such times when even a liter of oxygen is worth millions of Rupees, the conclusion being basic human amenities have started to fade away. Even after witnessing such crises around the globe, and the sacrifices of health care workers, people are still busy creating chaos for them or I would like to say “create a hell-like environment” for them to work in. Even after such a chaotic condition, health care workers are giving their best to control this health care emergency and since time immemorial, they are putting their life at risk for this society which are dwelling devils inside for them.

Keywords: Community, coronavirus, Covid-19, frontline warriors, healers, health, hospital beds, hospitals, life, medical vandalism, oxygen, pandemic, paramedical staff, PPE kits, protective gears, selfless, violence

Background

Health Care workers since time immemorial are putting their life at risk for the society in which they are living and contributing as healers. Even after putting their lives on the line, the violence on these health care workers has become so common that they are no longer hidden from the society they serve in. This social stigma continues as Doctors are facing a lot more discrimination in India from a society gripped with coronavirus panic. Does panic mean turning hostile against the very people who are our first line of defense against the Pandemic? What do they ask in return for putting their life at stake for us? They just expect a little decency and cooperation towards them instead of attacking them. For your safety, you don’t have to act violently against doctors. Instead, a simple gesture of respect would do more good than harm to the very society they are served by putting all of their efforts into it.

Patients exhibiting COVID-like symptoms first seek refuge under the foundational pillar of all health care systems, which is the friendly, neighborhood primary care physician. Most individuals instinctively approach a family medicine specialist or general practitioner, and in hostile situations, they are the first ones to bear the brunt of society’s hostile tendencies. As doctors, patients, individuals, and human beings, we must understand that these practitioners make up a huge chunk of the frontline force battling against the pandemic. This calls for respect and understanding on our part, and we must ensure that the service that these specialists provide to the masses is uninterrupted by hostility or societal misdemeanor.

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Not just the doctors but the primary health care workers like the nursing staff and the paramedical staff are under tremendous pressure due to the increase flow of patients towards them. The physiotherapists are constantly handling such high numbers of patients for SPO, management. Nursing staff as well are putting their best in a situation like this, for the betterment of affected ones. Socializing outside should be abandoned by each and every person until and unless it is the necessity of the hour. The primary health care workers are also the point of contact. At such an accelerated pace, the community spread from both, the doctors as well as from the primary health care workers will lead to havoc. Hence, this will not only aid the health care workers but also the person following it by avoiding contact with the outside world as this virus is very contagious and can be contracted even with minimal contact. This is the least we all could do to help those frontline workers working tirelessly for all of us to stay safe and healthy.

This review puts light on how discrimination and vandalism continues even when the whole world is fighting this COVID-19 pandemic when doctors are the only life saviors available.

Introduction to Covid

A coronavirus is a large group of RNA viruses that constitute the subfamily Orthocoronavirinae; they mainly cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, these viruses lead to respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal. Mild illnesses include some cases of common cold, whereas more lethal can cause Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), and COVID-19. Some lethal viruses were earlier identified-like SAR CoV-2 in 2003, MERS-CoV in 2012, and SARS CoV-2 in December 2019. There have also been a large number of animal coronaviruses identified since 1960.\(^1\)

The outbreak of the current pandemic began in Wuhan, a city in the Hubei province of China. Reports of the first COVID-19 cases started in early December 2019. Coronavirus is common in certain species of animals, although the transmission of coronavirus from animals to humans is rare, this new strain likely came from bats. However, it remains unclear exactly how the virus first spread to humans.\(^2\)

The disease appears to have originated from a seafood market in Wuhan where wild animals including marmots, birds, and bats are traded illegally. There are multiple theories of how this pandemic could have originated amongst which the united states (US) intelligence and national security officials say the United States government is looking into the possibility that novel coronavirus spread from a Chinese laboratory rather than a market, according to the multiple sources familiar with the matter; it is premature to draw any conclusion without proof and blame someone. According to officials, the current pandemic is not associated with Bioweapon research, as it was also thought to be a reason earlier, the reason for this theory is probably because of some of the mistakes done by the Chinese government while announcing the mortality rate this pandemic leads to. Well, this all just remains different-hypothetical theories.\(^3\)

Le Wenliang who was a Chinese ophthalmologist use to work at Wuhan Central Hospital. In late December 2019, alerted his colleagues about a mysterious pneumonia outbreak, that resembled severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), later identified as COVID-19. Multiple patient’s samples were subsequently sent to the laboratory for diagnosis, and the Hubei CDC started an investigation for the cause that was thought to be Pneumonia in late December 2019. Li was informed of this pneumonia outbreak by his colleagues working in other Wuhan hospitals. Li had a suspicion that this was not Pneumonia but a second strain of SARS-CoV-1 that is SARS-CoV-2 which he then shared with a WhatsApp group of colleagues. He was dubbed as a whistleblower when that shared report was later circulating publicly despite him requesting confidentiality from those he shared the information with. The rumor of a deadly SARS outbreak was then spread quickly among the Chinese social media platforms which Doctor Le never wanted. On 3 January 2020, Wuhan police summoned and admonished him for “making false comments on the Internet” which was not a rumor, after which when he returned to work and later contracted the virus from an infected patient (who had been originally treated for glaucoma). On 12 January 2020, Li was admitted to intensive Care of Wuhan Central hospital where he died during treatment. The Chinese government could have stopped this havoc then and there itself but instead, they chose to manipulate doctor Le and force him to keep quiet about the danger that he could see would destroy people’s lives. Doctors are manipulated, discriminated, and disrespected again and again and there is nothing new about it.\(^4\)

The outbreak was declared a public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020. WHO declared it as a Pandemic and made a list of common symptoms which includes fever, dry cough, and tiredness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention added six new symptoms of novel Coronavirus which include; Chills, Repeated shaking with chills, Headache, Muscle pain, Sore throat, followed by loss of taste and that of smell. A common myth amongst people is that the individual who has symptoms are only infected but people need to understand that asymptomatic individuals can also spread this virus as the incubation period is 2–14 days.\(^5\) Many other complications are also coming to the fore too. Even after getting completely cured, there are many postcovid complications, which are being reported around the world. Some of them are lung fibrosis, brain-related problems that are being dealt with by doctors around the globe. Mass discrimination against the frontline workers caused quite a stir in the health care sector. The professionals working at laboratories and diagnostic centers that aid the doctors are also at constant risk of getting infected. These professionals constantly work overtime to send back the reports to the public on time, but they are still not greeted with the same respect and monetary benefit. The workers aren’t monetarily recognized by the government which has led them to leave their job at which they are skillfully trained. Medical health care professionals are
being looked down upon irrespective of their selfless and tireless contributions towards saving lives.

Violence against the doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff has been reported since times immemorial. Medical vandalism is not restricted to a particular country. It has been reported across the globe. Incidents were reported in the USA where over 100 health care workers died as a result of vandalism during the period between 1980 and 1990. The stark rise in the violence against paramedics is being witnessed across the globe. The question which is beyond the comprehensive faculty of the human mind is why? Why are those who are putting their life at stake are the ones being treated as the culprits? Even after all this discrimination and doctors being considered as the major spreading pool of the virus instead of being though of saviors, are still treating the people with their very own generous minds and hands. It's time for society to understand that the time is much more complicated and difficult for the doctors around compared to the people. These doctors are the ones who without giving a second thought are inspecting the patients with their bare hands without thinking what would happen if the person whom they are inspecting is the one who is infected by this contagious virus.

The Indian Perspective

Medical and paramedical frontline workers all around the world are doing their best by providing every ounce of care to the patients. Even after knowing how critical the situation is and the contagiousness of the virus, they are still working even sometimes without the protective gear to save each and every soul possible without taking care of their own. Not only are they putting their life at staks but also of their loved ones because in the end they even have to reach their homes to sleep into. Some of the health care workers are even sacrificing that part by staying away from their loved ones, trying to avoid contact with them so that not only their family but also their patients can have a good night’s sleep at their own house. Health workers do realize that even after such an amount of effort which they are putting in society is not being thought of by the very own society they are treating, still they are trying to give their best. After taking a note of all these efforts being made by our health care workers, people still continue to treat them differently. Even after such work of hardship, they are being discriminated against by society on the basis of their psychosocial mindset that the frontline workers are the actual ones who are spreading the disease from the ill patients to the ones who are not affected by it. This mindset has led to various kinds of inhumane behavior towards all the medical as well as paramedical staff.

In India, the situation is even worse because not only they are being victimized but are also being abused physically. They are being thought of as puppets to be molded as per the needs of the patient and their family. Doctors do have a role to play in society and that role is to treat patients and give their best shot for the well-being of the patients. Even the nursing staff, who work commendably in their field to keep a check on vitals of the affected ones and also to take care of their health when the family members and the doctors are not around. If due to complications or some other factors, the life of a patient gets compromised which was not due to the fault of the doctor, the patient’s family still accuses the doctor and torture them emotionally, verbally, or physically. The assault against doctors is rising at the level of the sky, some assaults have even crossed that particular limit. Some of the incidents which took place in India started from Indore mob attacks on doctors. In Hyderabad (date: 16.04.2020) – an ugly incident, a COVID-19 patient purposely attacked a doctor who was on duty at Gandhi Hospital in the city. As per the reports given in the Times of India, the accused COVID-19 patient and his brother allegedly assaulted a resident doctor after their relative, also a coronavirus patient died due to co-morbidities. Another incident that took place here was on date: 16.04.2020 in Hyderabad itself where police officers arrested two Coronavirus-positive patients who attacked a Post Graduate medical student at Osmania General Hospital. This incident happened as these patients were demanding their release from the Quarantine and when denied, they abruptly attacked the doctor who was on duty. In Uttar Pradesh (date: 18.04.2020), a doctor working under the Department of Community Medicine in Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Medical College (LLRM) in Meerut as per the reports published in a Hindi daily newspaper, the doctor was beaten up due to the Lockdown imposed on the state, and his left hand was fractured by the assault. Even after facing such day-to-day difficulties, health care professionals are trying to give their best. If such assaults keep on rising, then a day would soon come when these healers will need a healer for themselves only. But the best part of these healers is that they are well aware of the current scenario and are still working effortlessly for this very own society because they treat it as a part of their family only. But I guess it's high time now, each one of us must realize how important they are! These health care takers are actually the roots of this tree or to be precise this “society” and without these roots none of this tree would have grown this tall.

The current scenario of COVID-19 has engulfed the whole world, and the frontline workers are still fighting to protect the people from its deadly effects but severe shocking cases about brutality against these health care workers have led humanity towards a path of destruction of itself only as people are not realizing that the ones they are beating today are the ones who would might be healing them in near future in some health condition or the other.

The Federation of Resident Doctors’ Association (FORDA) India due to this inhumane approach towards the frontline workers by its very own people for sake of who they are putting their own life in danger wrote to the Union Home Minister, seeking his arbitration amid this COVID-19 pandemic in view of the halt of the rise of such physical abuses against the doctors all around the country. The health care workers are demanding a quick response team to be made up by the local police stations in the residential areas to avoid this situation of havoc against the doctors and other para medical staff. The group...
also demanded that such “inhumane acts of violence” should be made a nonbailable offense. Stating that Central Protection Act for Doctors, as demanded earlier, is the need of the hour, the FORDA has now said this will work well for the protection of the whole medical fraternity. “The medical fraternity stands together in the national response against COVID-19.

Doctors and other health care workers are giving their best in the shot even at times like these and even after the violence that is being faced by them on a day-to-day basis. Still, there are some incidents that are being reported across India when doctors are busy spending their whole time in the testing phase of this pandemic. We had reported about such incidents are taking place in various states of the nation earlier in our letter as well,” FORDA wrote.[10]

To the hardships being faced by the doctors and the health care workers at the frontline among this situation of pandemic, the Centre led by Honorable Prime minister, promulgated an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, to add stringent provisions to punish those found guilty of such crimes. After a union cabinet meeting, the union minister addressed to the media that any attack against a health care worker will not be taken up lightly. The amendments approved by the Union cabinet will make any attack on health workers – be it doctors, paramedics, nurses, or Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers – a cognizable and nonbailable offense. The offense will carry a jail term of between 3 months and 5 years, and a fine ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh.

The amendments approved by the Union Cabinet will help all the health workers in India – be it doctors, nurses, or the paramedical staff for a nonbailable offense. As per the amendments, jail term of 3 months to 7 years, and a fine would be imposed ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 7,00,000 depending upon the severity of damage caused to the health care worker. If an attack is being done on a Doctor’s clinic or hospital, then the guilty must give a damage sum of double the property value in the market as compensation.

“The government’s message is clear. We will not tolerate attacks on our health workers who are rendering service. They are being looked upon as carriers of the virus and are attacked by people, including their neighbors. Be it harassment or violence, for the government, it is a zero-tolerance area,” Union Information and Broadcasting Minister of India said. This would bring a positive aspect not only to the doctors but also to the society in which they live. Even after such strict amendments if violence is caused against any health care worker, then investigation has to be done within a 30 days time period and a judgment must be delivered within 1 year of time period.[11]

In India when coronavirus was getting more and more deadly and with an increasing doubling rate, doctors and paramedical staff all around the country were starting to face a huge shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits. Even in such a situation, doctors all around India started to use raincoats and helmets to fight the coronavirus, exposing the weak state of the public health system ahead of an anticipated surge in COVID-19 cases.

In Germany, the situation was quite diverse there as the doctors handled the situation in a different way than the rest of the world. The doctors for the very first time conducted a protest in a totally exceptional way. They posed completely naked to gain the attention of the government on the matter of shortage of protective gears and kits. They named their protest “Blanke Bedenken, or Naked Qualms”, as members of the group how scared they were from the outcome of the pandemic all over the globe and their unheard voice from several months about the protective gears and kits. “Nudity is a symbol of how vulnerable we are without protections.”The doctors posed in their practices, taking cover behind files, toilet rolls, medical equipment, and prescription blocks.[12] The assiduity of doctors in this situation of the pandemic has cast a glare on how much overburdened public health system India has, and how less the funds are being invested upon the health GDP (that is 1.3% only) in India, which is among the lowest in the World.[13]

In India, people are facing this pandemic on a much bigger level. The efficiency of a health care system is measured by the amount of health-related services delivered by it to its population. After knowing this statement, people have started to realize and even witness the fall of the health care system of India. On the grassroots level, where hospitals must provide the basic amenities of health care to people, it has been noticed that this system is not even able to suffice the need for hospital beds. Their heartbeat instead of being in the hands of a doctor is now being held by the nonavailability of hospital beds. Suppose a person gets lucky enough to have a hospital bed for himself or herself, still there is a huge amount of possibility of suffering from the non-availability of one of the most important essences of life that is oxygen. There was a time when people used to laugh about water being sold in sealed packed bottles and now are busy spending their time and resources to gather packed volumes of oxygen in cylinders. Even after all these case scenarios, frontline workers are the ones who are still not giving up on this system. People are being treated in corridors and even in the compounds of hospitals by the hand of their very own healers in the times of scarcity of hospital beds. Knowing how infective this virus can get, doctors are not scared to perform mouth-to-mouth inspiration. Even witnessing this amount of will to sacrifice on the behalf of someone else’s life, people are still busy causing misery to their own healers. Along with this, a violent act was also observed in the Lotus Hospital, Agra, India. On the basis of fake rumors about the death of a patient, family members and relatives of those patients started to beat the hospital staff with a pedestal fan and helmet. This is how the health care workers are being awarded by the community they are serving selflessly.

Being aware of such dramatic and inconsiderate health care policies protecting doctors are, all the doctors are putting their utmost effort in safeguarding each and every life possible by putting behind their own. Not only are they busy protecting
humanity, but they are also at a loss of staying away from their families, knowing the fact that most of us are busy in spending quality time with them. And it is foolish to think that in today’s scenario any of the general population would put their life at stake for the sake of service to humanity unlike medical and paramedical personnel all over the globe. The least we can do is by staying inside our homes and avoiding social gatherings with our friends and family. Even if there is a necessity to contact the outside world, we should follow some basic and general safety measures. These measures include covering our mouth and nose with a cloth or mask, maintaining a distance of at least 1.5 meters when outside from other persons, and trying to wash hands frequently with soap or water or using alcohol-based sanitizers. These precautions can really help in lowering the chances of getting infected. This is the least we can do when all the health care workers are ready to risk their lives for this society.

Conclusions

“The New Untouchables”
Since a long time, we all are well aware of the term “Untouchables.” The caste system of untouchability in India is based on what is pure can be touched and what is impure cannot be touched, and this shallow mentality of the society is adding “new untouchables – the medical workers” in this society which are the very well healers of this society which is calling them untouchables itself.

From the hallowed hallways of multi-specialty hospitals to the caring cabin of the primary care physician, no place is spared from the vices of this immoral and ungrateful society. It is the same general populace, that in a state of wellbeing complaints and implicates the doctors to be the spawn of all evil, which comes with hopeful voices and tearful eyes when in a state of despair due to medical emergencies. This hypocritical nature of society’s devilish elements needs to be addressed urgently and it is the need of the hour.

We must urge and entice the policymakers of our time to think in accordance with the needs and problems faced by the health care workers. Things like subsidized treatment costs, medical insurances for the family of workers, reduced taxation for things like property and assets, along with heightened protection in workplace conditions need immediate attention and fast-track approval.

The healers have made countless sacrifices for this society, and still, they are being discriminated against. What good is a society without its healers? People should realize the importance of health care workers and what harm it could bring without their presence. Starting from the very first day of life or even much before that when all of us were in the belly of our mothers, we needed these professionals and till the very last day of our life, we need them. There must be some laws to protect these healers, and its time that society should also understand the worth of these professionals.

Without these medical workers, there won’t be anyone alive to call them the new untouchables of our so-called enlightened society.

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