

## While Sailing through the Uncharted Waters-Is the Arc Sinking the Captains?

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### *Editorial text*

Sailing through the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic the world seems to have come together in support of their Health workers who are diligently providing care to the patients despite the severe lack of resources and dangers to their own health. The so-called ceremonial 'Covid warriors' started captaining this sinking ship from the start of the outbreak donning anything from cotton masks, bandanas to Raincoats and suit made of Garbage polyethene. In an underfunded creaky public health system of developing countries like India COVID 19 has exposed all the patch works. While the World Health Organization recommends a doctor patient ratio of 1:1,000, there are fewer than one doctor available for every 1,457 Indians [1]. These extraordinary times have increased the pressure on already overworked health care workers manifold.

While the world is celebrating its COVID warriors across various countries as the statue of Christ the Redeemer lit up with the image of a medical scrub and the word "thank you" on Easter Sunday in Rio de Janeiro and a 20-foot-tall statue got unveiled in Latvia honouring the frontline workers fighting Covid-19, the situation in Indian subcontinent is rather abysmal [2, 3].

Apart from the virus what has been more challenging for them is facing stigma, censorship, attacks and intimidation as they fight the novel virus. Vulnerable healthcare workers face impossible choices with health conditions or personal circumstances that make them more vulnerable to covid-19. In many parts of the country, healthcare workers and doctors themselves have fallen ill following exposure to the virus. As per Health Organization (WHO) the COVID-19 pandemic has hit over 22,000 healthcare workers across 52 countries and region [4]. In the absence of a centralised mechanism for data gathering there is little or no information available about total number of healthcare staffs affected from COVID 19 in India especially from informal settings like smaller nursing homes or clinics. However, as the total no of cases crosses the 4 lacs mark in India, Delhi alone have reported more than 2,000 Healthcare Workers to be tested Positive for COVID-19, where, as many as 1,207 doctors and nurses are from the nine dedicated COVID hospitals [5].

They fear for themselves and are living in the constant fear of taking infection home to their loved ones. They have been discriminated, abused, misbehaved, spat, attacked, and beaten up while surveying, screening and treating COVID patients amidst all clapping, and clanging of vessels as expression of gratitude. They are being ostracised in residential complexes and have been forced to evacuate their houses by the Landlords fearing Coronavirus.

To improve the worsening situation the central government has come with provisions like amendment of Epidemic act, accidental insurance cover up to 50 lacs, mandating timely payment for all frontline workers and assisting them with accommodation and transport facilities [6]. While some states followed the directives, others ignored or followed only for the lockdown period or for a certain cadre of workers making it tricky for health care staff to find their own ways to negotiate with the administration and protect themselves. In most states with high rates of COVID-19, there are no strict rules on quarantining or testing healthcare workers nor designated quarantine facilities. Initially, as a norm, hospitals were sending their health staffs into a 14-day quarantine in designated facilities between two 14 day-long rotations in COVID-19 duty. But the increasing caseload and lockdown resulted in shortage of staff, especially in megacities like Mumbai and Delhi, as a result the quarantine period was reduced to three to seven days. Despite the fact

that healthcare workers are more susceptible to contract infection, presently there is no policy on regularly testing healthcare workers and support staff working in dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, other facilities or even non-COVID medical facilities. This lack of testing of healthcare workers puts their colleagues, patients and the community at a higher risk as they can act as super spreader. Poor working condition and lack of ad ministerial support has resulted in low morale for the health care workers as well as loss of trust in the system resulting in physical and mental burnout.

Healthcare workers are vital resources and cannot be treated like commodities running 24x7 for long periods. They are facing enormous physical and mental pressures and are at greater likelihood of burnout from overwork, fighting inside as well as outside of hospitals. Hence It is necessary that the health protection of healthcare providers is considered as a priority area that must be reinforced early on to ensure they can continue fighting against the virus, saving the sinking ship.

Here are few lines narrating the plight of a health care worker titled as 'A humble request'

### *A Humble Request*

In such 'Unprecedented' 'Lethal' times  
Fighting against a Virulent sly  
A 'War' fairly so 'Unfair'  
With Shields so 'Vitiated'  
and Arms so 'Inept'

Holding a sense of 'purpose' like never before  
On a wing of 'prayer' and another of 'hope'  
Leaving my 'little one' behind in cries,  
The mother in me died a hundred times,  
To give life to the 'Healer' in me inside  
To the Oath I've sworn to 'Fight for Life'.

One day at 'Ground zero' in the worn-out suit;  
I realised my temperature had risen too.  
Waiting test results with a bated breath...  
I saw deadly pallor across everyone's face.

Everything got changed in a wink of an eye.  
People clapping a day before;  
Started tongue-lashing my outcry,  
My colleagues, I heard, were spat and stoned  
Our journey as 'Warriors' had come to a hold!  
From Lighting candles to being manhandled;  
My family saw it all and had the highest to pay,  
Ostracized & bruised, they were evicted away!  
Today restrained to a hospital bed;  
Do I have 'Fear' or any 'Regret'?  
Would say with a thump  
'I would do it sure again'  
Winning back this 'Fight' and  
My 'Honour' thrown down the drain

However, I beg you all of a small request,  
If, we Die fighting this 'Corona crusade'.  
Don't pat us THEN for "heroic efforts"  
Don't quote us THEN "living Gods on the Earth"  
Please treat us TODAY as 'Humans' at the lest,  
Stop darting us perpetually for your 'Panic' & 'Rage'!

**Keywords:** Doctors; COVID; Violence; Ground Zero

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