

# COVID- 19 PANDEMIC: LESSONS LEARNT AND THE NEW NORMAL AS I SEE IT

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CORONA, COVID-19, SARS CoV-2; this virus goes by various names. It has proven its capacity to shake this entire world within no time. Nations which were great ones; both in the health and economic sector were ripped into pieces. The message was very clear "NATURE CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT HUMANS, BUT HUMANS CAN NOT SURVIVE WITHOUT NATURE". In a short period this virus, which was confined to Wuhan, spread its tentacle to the whole world and it was declared as PANDEMIC. Many countries even declared health emergencies, followed by lockdown, seal down, quarantine, international travel ban, travel ban between states, cities what not....? It was almost a century that the world has faced such a deadly pandemic and very few were alive to see both.

We were never prepared for what has come. From the place where I come from i.e. INDIA, which is a developing nation, decades of the neglected health sector was having little arsenal to fight the virus. Most of our national budget used to be reserved for national security. Since we were very neighbor to China within no time cases started being reported in India too. There were some speculations that it would not affect India so severely because of high temperature, widespread BCG vaccination, an endemic zone of dengue and polio, etc. In the very beginning due to some strict rules like nationwide lockdown cases were under control. But since we are still a developing nation we were not able to sustain lockdown of more than 90days, hence we were forced to liberate few rules of lockdown, which turned out to be a disaster. Even though we were having very good examples from Italy and the USA that what would happen if we don't

continue lockdown we didn't have a choice...! The result was a spike in the number of cases and before writing this article India has just topped the list with the maximum number of single-day addition of cases.

I'm a doctor by profession, to be particular an Anesthesiology resident in a national institute (AIIMS). So it's quite natural that I have to deal with it!!! Our institute was declared as complete COVID dedicated hospital! Regular services, emergency services were shut down.

In the very beginning, I was not happy with this decision because of fear of losing academics, research work, and skill development. Apart from my academics, it made its impact on my personal life too. I was afraid to visit my parents, near and dear once since I am one of the front line warriors. Midnight parties, evening gossips, and outings were now things of dreams.

Playgrounds have dried up. Laptops and mobiles were our new friends for online classes and entertainment. So both professional and personal life suffered in its hand.

And our war against this cruel corona started...! We started to face many difficulties like lack of proper PPE, if available they were of poor quality, there was no proper N-95 mask or we have to reuse the same, the much bigger problem was we didn't know what and how to treat patient!!! Because there was no definitive treatment and everything we were doing was symptomatic treatment. Even WHO kept changing its guidelines to treat patients. As and when new drugs were added to armamentarium and older ones replaced overnight creating a lot of confusion. With the lack of trained manpower, we as postgraduates were given additional responsibilities and with time we gained a lot of confidence in our work. Today I wear the PPE with a determination to save a life.

Things started to settle down slowly, and the image was becoming clear day-by-day that what we are dealing with. And we started to focus on what we have, and what best we can do for the betterment of patients. During this time many lessons were learned, not only about the health sector but also about the society.

1. THE HEALTH SECTOR NEDDS UPGRADATION: when the best of best world-class health sector nations scrambled to this pandemic, it's high time that we prioritize health service. This pandemic didn't break the system but it exposed the broken system. So care to be taken to protect caregivers and their workplace needs up-gradation.

2. HEALTH IS WEALTH: We observed patients with comorbidities have higher mortality rate and complications than normal healthy individuals who are infected. Darwin's theory of 'Survival of the fittest' again proved its importance. So, yes it's always good to stay in shape and have regular health checkups. People may have money but they can't buy health from it.

3. YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN: It may sound strange, but believe me; once you are diagnosed with this, no one will be there for you. Literally no one!!! Your friends, relatives, and even sometime your own family will abandon you. So, make your relationships stronger not your passwords. Technology, which was supposed to bring relationships together, is doing a quite opposite job. It's high time we stop "loving things, using people" culture.

4. DON'T TAKE EVERYTHING FOR GRANTED: Ohhh, yes we humans do that a lot. And I mean it. We took nature for granted and started to wrap it with our tiny shiny material called plastic! Guess what? We were served right back!! Now it's time for us to wrap with this plastic (PPE) and continue to work.

5. PERSONAL PROTECTION KIT: A MANDATORY EQUIPMENT: It's not a long time, where if I was asked to wear PPE for my own good I simply would have declined. But during this pandemic, we learned that it is for good reason and one should utilize it. Not only health care workers, but even common people started to worry about sanitation and personal hygiene.

6. HUMANS NEED TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER: During these difficult times, the true nature of one will be revealed. Many businesses that were small scale or which were just starting, meet their end. As humans one should support each other to overcome odds. Not only humans but also animals that are suffering from this need our support. Surprisingly both these acts started in our society irrespective of caste and religion.

And there are many more things we learned during this pandemic that were not mentioned here. Because an essay is not enough to enumerate all, hence we just focused on really important ones.

From now on for the next few decades, human life will never be similar. Whatever advanced technology we may have, but in front of Mother Nature, we are still young and very naive.

OUR FUTURE AS I SEE IT: A NEW NORMAL:

1. Traveling to places will never be the same. Even if we travel, it will be with more precaution than a joy.

2. Sanitizer, gloves, and masks are our new friends. For the next few years, we will be using them more often, that it will be routine for new generation.

3. Speaking about education; online mode of teaching will take over the formal education. And the Internet will be a basic need. From schooling to shopping, meditation to medication is now made available online.

4. The health sector found its importance. People are now convinced that it is really important for a nation to have a strong and advanced health system. Yes, defense system of the nation is important too; but to fight the enemy we need good health. At least in these wars, we can see and target the enemy, but we are fighting a war against the invisible enemy with equipment that is not definitive...

5. Home is where you can be REALLY safe. If it's not clear by now, I don't know when? You are safe within your home with your family, eating homemade food. The concept of partying, a social gathering for silly reasons, fancy dinner at a restaurant will be only seen in movies for the next few years. It's time to make your roots stronger.

6. And the final point is COVID-19/ CORONA is not going anywhere!!! Yes, you heard me right. It's going to stay with us for a long. So it's better if we learn how to live along with this virus. Along with this, search for a cure or a vaccine to end this pandemic must go on.... Our economy which is crashed now will take decades to recover, there may be unemployment, crime rates may increase, there might be a natural calamity for which no support will be provided, and even there might be wars between nations... Yes, this will be our new normal...

All I can say in the end is: The situation, which we are in, is not new to humankind, but yes challenges are new and we need to face it. Together we will survive this too. So always from now on 'HOPE FOR THE BEST, BUT PREPARE FOR THE WORST' .....

**Dr. Arun S K**

Anesthesiology Resident

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Patna