

## Covid 19 Pandemic & The Lessons learnt & the New-Normal as I see it

*Life will always find a way!....Michael Crichton*

"Unknown virus, lockdown , epicentre, ventilator.." these words flashed in all news network in the early days of January. We remained glued to news. Images , statistics and stories which when heard sent a chill down my spine. We tried to read , listen and watch articles and webinars so that we could gather enough knowledge before it struck us. Slowly our country went into lockdown and later it was released.

I am free lancer working in Mumbai suburbs. I firmly believed that if we followed all protocols we would never get COVID -19. However as days passed we slowly learned more about the virus and the disease .Fomites to aerosol spread , lung involvement to thrombosis, ventilator to avoid ventilators ...there was something new every day .Daily we changed protocols and our working environment . Slowly we accepted the fact that we may have to live with it . Along with triple H we will now have a Covid testing routine. Only difference is the high rate of false negatives which will always make us suspicious. It was only after a few days that I realised it can only be prevented but not completely avoided. All were only prophylactic measures.

**Locked own musings.** Initial days of lockdown was a mental dilemma. I was first worried about the thought that I may be the person due to which my parents would get infected was a recurring nightmare scenario that I imagined over and over again from March to May . We were not in a condition where we could stay separately. Many of my friends are doing that. We just decided to stick to protocols and follow all preventive measures. To avoid negative thoughts I started attending more webinars, reading books, home gardening and online fitness. Lockdown allowed me to catch a breath. See where I was heading and what I wanted to do. I restarted most of my hobbies and spent lot more time with my family. It was a blessing in a way. Much needed break for reacquainting with myself. With virtually no Traffic and even lesser talk in the O.T. ; those surreal days seemed more of a desolate movie set rather than a the Maximum city.

**Showing up** . Initially we were extremely concerned. I remember calling many seniors and colleagues about the methods and steps we should take before going for work At first it was difficult but later everyone started coming. All essential care workers knew it was the only way. We have to fight it and stand together against it.

There was a continuous increase in cases. Awareness about healthcare increased among everyone rapidly. All thanks to continuous news coverage and digital media. People were scared of visiting hospitals. Initially they completely avoided doctors, hospital staff and hospitals. Soon this trend changed. They started preferring telecommunication. They would do an in-depth study of their symptoms, surgery required , anaesthesia procedures and so on.

**Blessings in disguise:** This was a very positive change. Especially for small nursing homes. People avoided going to tertiary health care setups. While taking consent they would request for anaesthesia which would only desensitize the surgical field. They did not want to sleep. They did not want anything close or similar to ventilator. Mechanical ventilation had become a tabooed word. Demand for regional anaesthesia was increasing.

This was not limited only to the patients . Even surgeons and anaesthesiologist preferred regional anaesthesia. Due to increased fall negative reports, asymptomatic carriers and high infectivity; everyone wanted to avoid airway manipulation or handling. Surgeons who preferred quick, fast and silent general anaesthesia switched to praising and endorsing regional anaesthesia. This was a much needed change. Regional anaesthesia further decreased the hospital duration for patients. Regional anaesthesia made everyone happy and relaxed: Patient , anaesthesiologist, surgeon and health care staff.

As regional anaesthesia gained more and more acceptance and importance I was more inclined to explore it. Started reading more about various regional anaesthesia procedures which could be done for various surgeries. It was for the first time I came across segmental spinal anaesthesia. I gathered more knowledge about using epidural and continuous spinal epidural as sole anaesthetic techniques to reduce aerosol formation. I realised the need of availability of portable ultrasound for all anaesthesiologist was a must to give safe and good regional anaesthesia.

COVID-19 helped in streamlining and adapting to protocol based working method. Preoperative optimization of patient was done on out patient department basis. It helped in reducing the hospitalization days. History taking and preoperative evaluation was majorly done on video consultation. This was a huge change. Communication with all health care professionals increased tremendously. Entire plan of surgery started getting discussed with Anaesthesiologist, Surgeon, Physician and Health care staff preoperatively. We were able to give prior intimation to operation theatre staff. Thus decreasing staff in operation theatre and also exposure.

**New dress code.** We are totally covered. It was very difficult initially. Entire donning and doffing procedure would test our patience. N 95 mask and shields added to fogging. Identifying the small letters on ampoules was a huge task. Leg covers caused many to slip and fall. It was hot , humid and uncomfortable but a necessity. Many times we had to pay for our own ppe as the hospital or patient could not manage to get it. Slowly we adapted. Donning and doffing became the only time we would see our colleagues faces. It is like catching up at coffee break. Tapes and cotton pads helped with fogging. Our new dress code soon became our armour . we were proud of wearing that.

**Vaccines...** it is the present topic of discussion on all platforms. I sincerely hope we get an effective vaccine very soon. So that the fear and high mortality rate is decreased. So that we can return to normal. But at the same time I still want to continue the positive and good things we have started following. I want to adapt to our recalibrated protocols .So that we can continue doing what we enjoyed the most ! I sincerely hope we would always remember the words of Michael Crichton "Life will always find a way!"