

## Crisis or an opportunity: Are we learning from CoVID-19?

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The world is currently facing an unprecedented scenario in the form pandemic of coronavirus disease (CoVID-19). The healthcare systems around the globe have been upended by the sudden surge of this disease, and Pakistan is no different. Hospitals, doctors and paramedical professionals are confronted with numerous predicaments which are entangled with medical, social and economic instability. The variations in the number of cases and deaths per day, the financial pressure, insufficient protective equipment's for healthcare staff one can speculate that the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. While everyone is anxiously waiting for the vaccine to be developed, the only option is prevention. Sheltering-in-place, social distancing, use of personal protective equipment, sanitizing and de-fumigation is mandatory part of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of all the institutions. As these restrictive measures are life-saving, therefore the public response in adopting them is also exceptionally well. This is all part of primary health care which according to WHO is; "A whole-of-society approach to health and well-being centered on the needs and preferences of individuals, families, and communities".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in order to provide the best health care to the patients; clinicians, scientists and researchers around the world are working round the clock to provide latest guidelines to counter this disease and treatment modalities to improve the symptoms. Inflow of data regarding what is working and what is not is constantly emerging in almost all the medical journals, print media, social and electronic media. Governments along with funding agencies are all fully supportive of any evidence-based work that leads to the improvement of disease progress. In short, the world has put on a united

front to combat this virus. Although, the situation is challenging but it is imperative not to neglect other medical priorities. The lessons learned from this can be applied in providing an improved health care system.

Access to health care has been marginalized due to imposed restrictive measures; thus, it is absolutely essential to start thinking about what is coming next. Covid-19 has undeniably emerged as the most devastating health emergency in recent times; however, there is a bigger threat that has been looming constantly over the world for more than a decade. The pandemic accounting for more than 17 million deaths; cardio-metabolic disorders still remain the leading cause of mortality around the world.<sup>2</sup> Recent trends have shown a decreased mortality rate due to these disorders in the developed countries whereas; in low- and middle-income countries the figures are still sky rocketing. Moreover, the development of these disorders is initiated at a younger age causing amplified burden to individual itself, health care systems, society and especially national economy.<sup>3</sup> The data around the globe has shown that people with risk factors and chronic disorders are more vulnerable and have shown adverse consequences compared to normal healthy individuals.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore crucial to work and develop feasible and sustainable policies and systems which are directed towards prevention so as to minimize the overall disease burden.

In developed countries, robust preventive systems for cardio-metabolic disorders have been part of the routine health care,<sup>5</sup> whereas, there is no such system in place in Pakistan. Although, provision of primary health care is the fundamental right of everyone, initiative towards primary prevention of non-communicable disorders has never

been prioritized. The current situation has provided us with an excellent opportunity to highlight this issue as well as to propose options that can be used to benefit population at large in a resource friendly way. People are already acclimatized to the use of telemedicine for medical advice. Print and Social media platforms are widely utilized for the dissemination of information. The age of SOPs has finally arrived in Pakistan and people are more receptive towards following the recommended rules. The health has become top priority at the government level and the efforts of medical professionals are being recognized. All these factors can be used to counter a more resilient problem i.e. the cardio-metabolic disorders.

Online preventive medicine clinics aligned with technology-oriented software programs is the need of the hour. The domain of these clinics would be to support the individuals who have not yet developed the disease but have acquired risk factors. These clinics do not essentially require specialized consultants; the work can be done by medical officers, nurses, nutritionists and fitness experts. Online internships for medical students can also be initiated for this purpose. This will emphasize on the importance to develop computer and IT expertise by the health care professionals. The access to these clinics can be through any virtual media available including phone, email and print/social media. Social media platforms are already favored by general population as means to interact with individuals having similar problems. People with similar goals are more receptive when they work together so as to achieve the desired response. Software directed continuous monitoring can help in optimization of risk factors, modifying physical activity and access to personalized diet plan according to individual's profile. Moreover, training to self-evaluate by monitoring vital signs and recognizing emergency symptoms and respond accordingly would help those in need. On-line teaching in schools, colleges and universities have also been evolved in a very short amount of time. These platforms can be used by the schools, colleges and universities to assess overall cardio-metabolic profile of all the children. Those who are at risk can be aligned with these online preventive clinics which would guide them as to how the cardio-metabolic profile can be improved. Their progress can be monitored with the help of software and

apps which can be developed by the institutions themselves and ideally it can be initiated at the government level. Similar models can be developed for any institute in which the employees are mostly sedentary and therefore at risk. With more awareness and guidance through these on-line preventive clinics, there would be decrease burden on the hospitals; moreover, it will provide an ideal opportunity to augment people's ownership towards their own health.

In conclusion, ramifications of CoVID-19 will be widespread and enduring. We need to start planning for the post-CoVID era. Sustainable and long-lasting methods should be developed in way that no one is left behind. By addressing these risk determinants general population will become self-aware about their own health, adapting to lifestyle change will be not be seen as an impossible thing and the burden on the hospitals and the overall health system will decrease. It will also be beneficial in an event of future similar calamities. We should learn from this one of a kind situation and utilize this crisis as an opportunity for the improvement of health care.

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