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Beyond the Number, Balancing Epidemiological Reporting with the Need for Patient Empathy During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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Overview of Pandemics

A substantial number of pandemics and communicable disease epidemics that have occurred were caused by novel strains of viruses. [1] By 2020, three of these epidemics have been caused by the novel strains of beta coronaviruses and present like influenza, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) [2].

SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) is a coronavirus that caused an outbreak in December 2019 in Wuhan, in the Hubei Province of China; the disease progressively spread and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020. [3-6] COVID-19 transmission occurs through the contact or virus particles, from an infectious host to the mucous membrane of an individual at risk [7-10].

Epidemiological Reporting During Pandemics

Epidemiological reporting (ER) is an important tool in public health especially

during any community health outbreaks such as epidemics and pandemics. Epidemiological reports are essential instruments for the rapid and accurate dissemination of epidemiological information on cases and disease outbreaks including other communicable diseases of public health importance with emerging and re-emerging infections inclusive [11]. An epidemiological report contains information drawn from surveillance of a disease condition; this is because it provides an overview of the epidemiology of a disease of public health importance [12]. The systematic collection, collation and analysis of data with its dissemination to those who are in a position to take action is known as surveillance; Surveillance is important in the practice of public health [13, 14, 16].

It is necessary as it provides information about a disease according to person, time and place [17]. Reporting of surveillance is important for the development of strategies that address some specific health conditions [18].

Epidemiological reports aids in real-time planning, provision and evaluation of health care services during pandemics [19]. The

COVID-19 pandemic has had many epidemiological reports from different countries since the beginning of the pandemic with the country releasing reports. Each country decides if its agency is authorized to develop and to release such reports deciding on the frequency at which the reports are released [20]. There are challenges globally in the capacity for health institutions to produce Epidemiological Reports consistently and accurately [20]. Literature has found that Low- and Middle- Income countries predominately having the most challenges than higher-income countries [21]. Epidemiological data are necessary to provide interventional strategies for the coronavirus disease outbreak [22].

Empathy during Pandemics with Focus on Epidemiological Reporting

Empathy is an umbrella term that captures the range of responses of an individual to another individual's experience or an individual's ability to show concern to the feeling of others [23]. Undoubtedly, empathy remains critical to the quality of patient

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care, but the well-being of healthcare professionals cannot be neglected in the process too [24, 25].

Literature has found that the empathy attribute of health professionals becomes tried and sometimes be lacking in pandemic circumstances [28, 29]. Even though individual choices are legally limited during epidemics and pandemics; it is also important to ensure that human dignity is not eroded.

Empathy and Epidemiological Reporting In COVID-19

The global emergence of SARS-CoV-2 infection has led to the strengthening of the capacity and organization of public health institutions in rolling out daily statistical data [30]. However, ER doesn't have any empathetic component to assist in the planning of actions to address pandemics; the literature has shown direct or indirect negative effects of epidemiological reporting and subsequent measures [30, 31, 32, 33, 34]. Indirect consequences of ER on patient empathy could stem from strict adherence to COVID-19 control measures and its negative effect on mental health. For instance, patients might get relatively limited empathy as a result of healthcare professionals over-reliance on Telemedicine in response to ER guidance or healthcare professionals fear invasive medical procedures due to misinterpreting ER guidance [35]. ER has been found to have led to the isolation of the elderly from their support systems which could have negative outcomes related to physical injuries or mental health conditions such as depression [36, 37].

There is a need for ER to have a component that addresses empathy in its reporting. This component will hopefully address the inclusion of empathy in the plans or activities of governments, institutions and healthcare professionals utilize to address health challenges.

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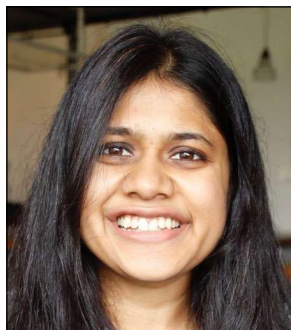
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The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Hospital-Based Health Services



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A health system consists of all organizations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health [1]. This includes efforts to influence determinants of health as well as more direct health-improving activities [1]. Hospital-

based services (HBS) are a vital component to a health system: they are an important endpoint in a health systems patient referral pathway and play a key role in supporting primary level health services [2]. Globally, HBS are a limited resource and the lower-

income countries tend to have greater challenges in HBS resource availability than the high-income countries [3]. There are on average only 113 hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants in low-income countries less than half the number in other developing countries and around 80% below high-income countries [3]. The difficulty for countries to achieve their HBS goals was further compounded on the 11th March 2020 when WHO declared that COVID-19 can be categorized as a pandemic [4].

Impact of COVID-19 on hospital-based services

COVID-19 has posed serious challenges to health systems globally HBS being impact-

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