

COVID Diaries: An Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has shaken up the world and these COVID times have allowed us to slow down, log out, switch off for a while and think about our real needs against greed. The 'lockdown' has provided us with an opportunity to pursue our hobbies and passion, to learn a new skill, to read your favorite books, watch movies which you have missed, to work-out which you missed doing due to paucity of time and to sit back and think about how to improve and make ourselves a better person. Most of us can work from home and if we are determined, we can cut down on our travel thus reducing air and water pollution in addition to a significant reduction in the number of road traffic accidents. The health crisis brought every one of us together and Corporate India shouldered its corporate social responsibility, reel heroes and cricket legends played their part well and Corona warriors led the war against the virus with grit and determination under the able leadership of a dynamic Prime Minister.

Keywords:

COVID-19, Lockdown, Corona, Pandemic

Introduction

COVID-19 has shaken up the world and things would not be the same again after this phase passes off. The era would be divided into "before corona" and "after corona". During these difficult times, people have realized a few very important things. In fact, in the race of life where everyone was running like crazy against time, these COVID times have allowed us to slow down, log out, switch off for a while and think about our real needs against greed. It has allowed us to interact with our family members and understand them in this ultra-busy world.

The 'lockdown' has provided us with an opportunity to pursue our hobbies and passion, to learn a new skill, to read your favorite books, watch movies which you have missed, to work-out which you missed doing due to paucity of time and to sit back and think about how to improve and make ourselves a better person. If you don't come out of this lock-down with a new skill, more knowledge, better health, and fitness, you never lacked time but you lacked discipline. In this digital era dominated by the media where we are constantly being fed with all the technical information including standing operating procedures followed by premier medical institutes against the war against the coronavirus, advisories, policies, and preparedness against the disease, this article lists and discusses the lessons learnt during these tough times, the innovative ways the corona warriors adopted to valiantly lead the fight and the impact of the lock-down on the mental health of the general population.

Discussion

COVID times are difficult times and these too shall pass. Let us learn some lessons which these times want us to learn. Let us come out of these times better and stronger. Nature and mother earth want to teach us some important lessons the importance of which we did not realize since nature was whispering in our ears and we could not hear those whispers in the noise of our

busy lives. Now because of the 'lock-down', human life has come to a stand-still, and the chirping birds, fluttering butterflies and dancing peacocks around us have probably made us more receptive to hear those whispers of mother nature. Global warming and Carbon footprints which were just technical terms so difficult to explain how much damage and pollution we have caused have been taught to us by 'Nature' so easily during these COVID times. Man probably will be more careful not to pollute the environment and will try to live in harmony with the ecosystem instead of destroying it.

Man who spends his whole life earning and saving to build a house of his own seems to be caged in his own house during these lock-down times as it is really difficult for the male species to stay at home [1]. Pollution levels have drastically come down in this situation of complete lock-down when the whole world has stopped traveling and everyone is restricted to wherever one is to prevent the spread of coronavirus pandemic. What an irony it is that when the air pollution has significantly reduced and we have a significantly cleaner air to breathe, we are moving around with masks around our faces.

Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with an infodemic and economic pandemic. The media is a double-edged weapon. On one hand, it provides useful, prompt and vital information to the masses but as is said 'Everything in excess is a disease,' excess and unwanted information is devastating. People are being bombarded with an excess of unscientific, unnecessary and unverified information about the coronavirus disease to such an extent that it has created a ripple effect. The language being used in the media to describe the outbreak is undoubtedly contributing to the mass hysteria about the disease[1]. This media hype about the disease has led the retailers around the world to ration toilet paper and pharmacies black market masks and hand sanitizers and has fuelled panic and anxiety about the disease in the general public [1].

Economic meltdown

Lockdown means cessation of non-essential movement of people and economic activities for the said period. Factories are closed, industrial production is at its lowest and labour is not available. All economic activities which help nations progress are at a standstill. JP Morgan estimates Indian economy contracting by 40%, fiscal deficit to rise to 5.07% and unemployment reaching 20% in the quarter ending June 2020. The world economy faces a \$5 trillion hit. International monetary fund forecasts that coronavirus would cause the worst economic downturn since the great depression. As a medical person, am worried about the economy because health care is a business and the Physician knows nothing about profits and it is the Administrator who converts these health care activities into profits [2]. Doctors have an ethical commitment to secure patients' physical wellbeing as well as their wallets also expecting them to oversee costly and unnecessary investigations prudently [3]. Economic meltdown will cause the already costly health care to become more expensive and unaffordable to those who will require health care the most.

Health infrastructure

Health care was never a priority of the government until the corona virus arrived. Nobody probably realized that we need to spend more on building hospitals and improve our health infrastructure. There is no trend of people saving money for a health emergency contrary to the saving plans of the present generation who plan well and save money through systematic investment plans to buy a car, a house or go for a vacation. Health insurance penetration is extremely poor. To sum up, neither the government nor the people realized the importance of health care facilities which probably they will after the corona times.

Lock-down

Is lock-down the treatment for coronavirus and what are we achieving with a world-wide lockdown being observed by almost all nations? Lock-down is just an attempt to delay the transmission of the virus within the community and hope that the virus mutates to become less virulent. If we do not follow lock-down as suggested by the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, it would be catastrophic and there would be a sudden surge in the number of cases of coronavirus infection which probably our health care facilities would not be able to handle.

Is India managing it well?

Prime Minister Modi

India has played its role well under the dynamic leadership of a calm, composed and reassuring Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and is becoming the epicenter of the global fight against the corona virus epidemic. According to WHO, India is a hugely populous country and the future of this pandemic will be determined by what happens to densely populated countries. India has noiselessly and efficaciously responded to this pandemic at multiple levels and rose beyond its immediate national concerns. It has evacuated a huge number of Indians from the corona virus hotspots China, Iran, Italy. Medical help in the form of consumables and equipment not only requested by neighboring countries like Bhutan and Maldives but also by countries of the developed world was provided willingly by India.

Corporate India

Corporate India rose to the occasion and stood by the government in these difficult times. From making masks, sanitizers, and ventilators to contributing funds, Indian companies came forward to help the government and people of the country to fight the virus. Mr. Ratan Tata has been instrumental in donating INR 1500 Crores to fight the virus. Mr. Azim Premji of Wipro group committed an aid of INR 1125 Crores for the cause. Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has offered to set up medical facilities to quarantine travellers from other countries in addition to his contribution to the Prime Minister Relief fund. Mr. Anand Mahindra of Mahindra and Mahindra group, an auto company has vowed to manufacture and donate ventilators for the cause. Stalwarts of the entertainment industry like Akshay Kumar and cricket legends like Sachin Tendulkar came forward to help for the cause.

Railways

Indian railways have effectively participated in the war against COVID-19. Several steps have been initiated to reduce the spread of the disease. Most railway zones have hiked platform tickets from Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 in a bid to discourage gathering of large crowds. To improve hygiene, they have increased drive against spitting and imposed heavy fines against it. They have converted 5000 rail coaches into isolation wards and are running special trains to transport perishable food items and essential commodities to places where they are required.

Army

The Indian armed forces launched 'Operation Namaste' and walked shoulder to shoulder with the civil administration against the war against the corona virus. It has provided quarantine facilities, isolation facilities, intensive care beds, high dependency unit beds, and testing facilities at several places.

Police

The police had a tough task at hand to enforce the lock-down. It is difficult for the male species to stay home[1]. The same civil administration who would request the people to come out of their homes and vote on the election day had to persuade the public to stay indoors to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection [1].The police went theatrical to enforce the lock-down and used their in-house talent to create corona anthems and plays on coronavirus, danced on corona tunes and wore corona hats and helmets.

Health care workers

The COVID warriors: Doctors, Nurses, Nursing assistants, Operation room assistants, housekeeping staff and non-technical staff working in COVID hospitals were at the forefront in the fight against coronavirus. They were exposed to the infection the most while looking after and treating the patients despite the use of Personal protection equipment in the form of gloves, masks, goggles or a face shield, and gowns and aprons. To meet the deficiency of medical and para-medical staff, student volunteers from various medical colleges, dental colleges, Ayurvedic and Unani medical colleges in both government and private sectors were enrolled as COVID Warriors. Not only students, even private medical practitioners, specialists, people who had done nursing courses and other paramedical staff, could also register themselves as

COVID Warriors. Prime Minister, Mr. Modi who is known to periodically create participatory events to make people feel a part of the governance and strengthen the relationship between the leader and the governed, publicly expressed his gratitude and thanked the doctors for their yeoman service for the mankind and appealed to the people of India to join him in applauding the doctors. He probably has realized that in this era of rising trend of violence against doctors we need to express our gratitude to the doctors and paramedical who would play a pivotal role as COVID warriors against the fight against coronavirus in addition to improving government health care facilities, doctor to patient ratio, hospital bed to patient ratio so that the small and medium private health care centers play a supporting role in providing health care services to the government medical facilities[4].

Impact

The lockdown has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of road traffic accidents. Statistics suggest that roughly about 10000 lives have been saved by the lockdown in India in one month due to road traffic accidents as against a loss of 200 lives due to coronavirus. Probably it is the collateral benefit of allowing the earth to breathe. Most of the rivers are cleaner and nature is probably healing on its own. It has had a dramatic impact on air pollution levels.

Hand hygiene and washing hands with soap and water has been recommended in the corona times to prevent the spread of infection. Frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds is being recommended to be effective. Are we looking at a water crisis after the corona crisis is over is a matter to be thought about. Let's conserve water.

Repeated and persistent news on TV, print media and social media about the COVID spread, preventive measures, and steps taken by the government to tackle the situation has caused anxiety and panic in the general population. They are somehow feeling a basic impingement on the basic human

rights to move freely in their land and a sense of captivity and dis-empowerment during these difficult and extended locks down periods.

Conclusion

We have impacted nature and COVID has impacted our lives and we should take lessons from this crisis. It is probably a time to take a pause during this lockdown and think about the needs and greed. What an irony that the world economy is about to collapse because man has started spending on essential items of need during these lockdown times. We have realized that most of us can work from home and if we are determined, we can cut down on our travel thus reducing air and water pollution in addition to a significant reduction in the number of road traffic accidents.

The health crisis brought every one of us together and Corporate India shouldered its corporate social responsibility, reel heroes and cricket legends played their part well and Corona warriors led the war against the virus with grit and determination under the able leadership of a dynamic Prime Minister.

Health infrastructure needs to be improved and we need to spend more on health care. Water is scarce and we need to use it judiciously. The pandemic is associated with an infodemic and will have huge economic repercussions.

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