

## COVID-19 Pandemic: Shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, Use of Improvised Surrogates, and the Safety of Health Care Workers

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Dear Editor,

As of April 3, 2020, more than 900000 cases of COVID-19 from over 200 nations have been reported.<sup>1</sup> The rapid rise in the number of cases have overwhelmed the health care systems of many nations. In parallel with the increase in the burden of disease, there has been acute and critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), especially in the regions that are hit hard by the disease.<sup>2</sup> In response to the shortage, in United States, government has lifted the Food and Drug Administration standards for PPE. Also, Centers for Disease Control has made the liberal recommendations for the use of PPE, when the resources are scarce.<sup>3</sup>

At present, the high-income nations are hard hit, but at the same time, we can see the surge in cases in low and middle income countries (LMICs). Looking at the global trend, we can confidently predict that the LMICs won't be spared. The shortage of PPE will be even a bigger problem in LMICs, due to constrained resources.

We do see health care workers using a lot of improvised surrogates for the standard PPE, ranging from rain coats, scarfs, visor made from transparent sheaths, etc. Seeking the surrogates for standard PPE, during the moments of crisis is desirable, however, quality assurance of the surrogates to ensure safety of the health care workers is of paramount importance. Significant controversy exists regarding the safe duration and method of reusing the PPE. Without such mechanism to ensure safety, potentially, many health care workers may be using improper surrogate, which would confer both the false sense of security and impending harm.

We do see a significant proportion of health care workers, caring the patients with COVID-19 getting infected and some losing lives. Urgently, there need to be developed

some mechanism to ensure safety and effectiveness of these improvised surrogates.<sup>4</sup> Protecting the health-care workers, who are the most valuable resources during this pandemic, should be the top priority of every nation.

### REFERENCES

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