

The Tragic Plight of Frontline COVID-19 Warriors in Nepal

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Dear Editor,

Nepal is a small landlocked country sharing its border with giants India and China. Due to the difficult geography of high hills and mountains, the delivery of healthcare services in rural areas has always been a challenge. This low-middle income country relies heavily on international funds for healthcare needs and supplies. The corona era has witnessed an unprecedented acute shortage of personal protective equipment in Nepal. Besides, with the lack of therapeutics for COVID-19, healthcare workers are combating the COVID-19 battle without any armor. In such a scenario, where healthcare workers are risking their lives to treat the sick, it is really sad to hear of untoward incidents where healthcare workers are being shunned for the fear of being infected in some countries.¹ There are reports of discrimination and harassment of healthcare workers in Nepal too. Healthcare workers are not allowed entry to their rented apartments by the owners.² Healthcare workers who should have been applauded for their services are now slammed with the social stigma of disease carriers and spreaders. A gloomy incident of duty doctors being physically assaulted by the police with the baton for being out in the streets during the lockdown has been reported.³

The frontline healthcare workers treating the COVID-19 patients are themselves more vulnerable of getting infected. They are risking themselves at the cost of infection, many of whom are already tested positive. In a recent incident reported from Nepal, people from the neighborhood put derogatory words on banners and posters in front of the residence of a corona positive doctor.⁴ There are incidences where the locals tried to evict the health care works from their locality. Various countries across the world have been encouraging and applauding the services of healthcare workers, but in Nepal the scenario is different. Health workers are neither safe in their workplace or at their home. The constant fear of acquiring the virus stresses them at the workplace and derogatory remarks, behaviors and in rare

cases physical assaults have weakened them mentally. This is how healthcare workers are mistreated for their heroic service to society during difficult times in Nepal.

Is it humane to attack healthcare workers for no fault of theirs? Is humanity really on sale? In a small country like Nepal with limited healthcare resources, the government needs to do more to protect healthcare workers from such untoward incidents being repeated. The emergence and spread of the virus has created chaos and anxiety in the general public, however, stereotyping a health professional will do more harm than good. Misinformation about the corona virus spreads as wildfire in the social media. The government has to come up with a concrete action plan to limit the spread of infodemics to the general public already living in a havoc.

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