

Saving Lives and Saving Livelihood; Reflections on Discovering the New Normal

Aftab Mohsin

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Pandemic, Lives, Livelihood, New normal.

How to Cite This:

Mohsin A. Saving lives and saving livelihood; reflections on discovering the new normal. *Biomedica*. 2020; 36 (COVID19-S2): 10-2.

These are the defining moments in human history. The World is changing! Now we have to change accordingly. We are to discover a 'new normal'. The urgency is unprecedented, the risks unparalleled, cost of failure unthinkable and the course to follow uncharted.

I quote the great poet of East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal:

Aayen-e-Nau Se Darna, Tarz-e-Kuhan Pe Arna

Manzil Yehi Kathan Hai Qoumon Ki Zindagi Mein

Ye Karwan-e-Hasti Hai Taz Gaam Aesa

Qoumain Kuchal Gayi Hain Jis Ki Rawa'rawi Mein

To be afraid of the new ways, to insist on the old ones

This is the only difficult stage in the life of nations

This caravan of life is so fast moving

Many a nation is trampled in whose race

It is an advice as well as a warning!

Not that it was not expected; such a pandemic has been forecast by public health experts as well as by various think tanks, including one that is headed by the famous Bill Gates of Microsoft, and Melinda and Gates foundation.¹ Those who have been warning about such a pandemic unfortunately were meted with the fate of the cursed Greek goddess, Cassandra, who was cursed by the Greek God, Apollo, to give correct prophecies, but due to the curse her prophecies would not be believed!

It is time for reflection! A virus, named SARS-CoV-2, has challenged the very existence of present-day mankind; the pandemic has put extreme stress on the fabric of human society. Some parts of the fabric are already torn and shredded. Shredded and torn are the families and loved ones of nearly 369,394 people (as of May 30th, 2020) who have lost their lives because of it!² Many more are sick and debilitated, shattered but recovering. The economies, the world economies are falling apart. Unemployment has sky rocketed. Mental health is on a rapid decline.

It is time for quick and accurate reflection. People have to rise above their self and discover the correct normal, the new normal. We did discover the 'new normal' after 9/11. The life of almost everyone who lived changed; many wars were fought in the name of "War on Terror" playing

Correspondence to:
Prof. Dr. Aftab Mohsin
Prof. of Medicine (Rtd.)
Liver Clinic, Jail Road,
Shadman, Lahore - Pakistan.
Email: aftabmohsin1@gmail.com

havoc. Countries ruined. However, we did discover a new normal. The price the humankind paid was colossal. Total loss of life in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq along with allied forces was above 1,000,000. And the total cost of the war was more than 3000 billion US dollars, but a new normal was discovered! A new normal has to be discovered now, speedily, for so many activities and businesses.

Two segments require immediate attention. The lives and livelihood will have to be protected. The healthcare and economies have taken the major brunt and will need an urgent bail out.

Saving lives will need major overhaul of the healthcare industry and to save lives an effective and safe vaccine is being considered the only viable option. However, it may be a year away. Till then, human lives have to be saved, healthcare workers and all those working on the frontline are at greater risk. They need to save themselves while they battle on the corona frontlines. The departments, organizations, professional bodies, institutions, public as well as private, the governments and the World all need to facilitate this change. But all meaningful change begins with oneself.

Make the change that you want others to make!

While a vaccine is developed, tested, approved, distributed and administered, there are urgent healthcare issues. One issue in our country is lack of ventilated beds for Covid-19 cases, and other is segregation of corona and non-corona virus cases, so that the care and treatment of all types of patient progresses satisfactorily. A quick solution was found in Wuhan China where they made two dedicated hospitals of 1000 beds each within a span of ten days. And in New York where they lost more than 30,000 lives this spring of 2020, by moving Naval Ship hospital of 1000 beds, USNS COMFORT.³ We need those beds. We do not have the capacity like China or USA. The Private healthcare industry in Pakistan is crumbling. Elective surgeries have gone down; serious patients are refusing to come to the hospitals. A joint effort by forging a private-public partnership, with private hospitals and medical colleges can serve everyone. We need to convert some of the private teaching hospitals into COVID-19 hospitals, safeguarding the interest of their workers and owners, to prevent further loss of life and livelihood.

Against the backdrop of this health crisis, could there be a *silver lining*? There is greater recognition that red tape and bureaucratic rules have stumped innovation and both, part inefficiency and part corruption have resisted change to robust and efficient healthcare delivery. In light of these revelations, there is greater flexibility and abundant will amongst the policy makers, and administration for an advancement and change in healthcare delivery, such as the rise of telehealth and telemedicine. Staying home reduces the risk of infection. Additionally, it tends to empower both the patient and the doctor: telehealth makes quality healthcare more affordable and more accessible. Telehealth can also help us with monitoring and delivering healthcare to those patients who are avoiding hospitals and clinics out of the fear of the coronavirus. Furthermore, telehealth can capture those experienced healthcare providers, who due to their age or underlying conditions may be avoiding practicing healthcare for fear of contracting the virus. In an already overburdened healthcare system, the experience and qualification of these doctors will be vital.

The second front where public health experts can really help is by defining the new Standard Operating procedures for keeping the economy rolling. The businesses have to open up. Our Prime Minister has been emphatic about running the businesses with minimal loss to human health and human life. We are probably past the stage of containment; a lockdown may be a temporary measure a temporary fix! It comes with a cost, a phenomenal cost.

What I recommend is to have a body to look at pros and cons of all the measures that are taken. If possible established under National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan. This body of experts shall study the affect and effect, of all measures, to monitor, review and report upon each regularly. A continuous change that is driven by data rather than the desire or wish shall define the new normal. We have to begin with reflection, and follow with rigorous data monitoring and evaluation till a new normal is arrived upon. These are changing times and change. We must rise above the silos in this highly specialized World. We need a think tank. The quote of greatest Greek scholar, Socrates, "*True knowledge exists in knowing that we know nothing*" can be the right starting point!

Together we can do it. The finish line is away, the starting line isn't clear yet! It's a dilemma, the true dilemma! It's happening, it's for real, and it's now.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

REFERENCES

1. Gates B. We're not ready for the next epidemic. But we can get there. Gates Notes. March 18, 2015. Available online at: <https://www.gatesnotes.com/Health/We-Are-Not-Ready-for-the-Next-Epidemic>. [Last accessed on 30th May, 2020].
2. Worldometer. COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Available online at: [https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?%22%20%5C1%20%22countries%3Ca%20href=\[Last accessed on 30th May, 2020\]](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?%22%20%5C1%20%22countries%3Ca%20href=[Last%20accessed%20on%2030%20May%202020%20]).
3. Brittany C. The 1,000-bed US Navy hospital ship that docked in New York to help the city brace for coronavirus is leaving — see inside the USNS Comfort. Apr 22, 2020. Available online at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-1000-hospital-bed-navy-hospital-ship-coronavirus-2020-3>. [Last accessed on 25th May, 2020].

Prof. Dr. Aftab Mohsin (FRCP, FRCPE) is a Retired Professor of Medicine, Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore. Earlier he served as Principal in Gujranwala Medical College, Gujranwala from 2013 to 2017. He attained distinction in his profession by establishing the first liver transplant facility at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Islamabad in 2010 followed by founding the first department of Gastroenterology and GI endoscopy under the administrative control of Government of Punjab at Services Institute of Medical Sciences Lahore. Earlier he served as the first Controller of Examinations at University of Health Sciences, Lahore from 2002 to 2003. His research interests include gastrointestinal and liver diseases and he has more than 50 research publications on his credit in national and international peer reviewed journals.