

Preparing for Post COVID-19 Stage

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ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 has emerged, 2022 is predicted by researchers as the year for the return of normalcy. With every domain of life at halt, the tardiest recovery will be in education and research where 1.5 billion learners have been affected globally by the Pandemic. With meticulous but strong concomitant situation analysis by the universities, robust measures need to be taken to ensure (1) optimal mental and physical health of all faculty, staff and students, (2) balancing the financial and managerial crises and (3) development and implementation of long-term policies to stand-up to the challenges of this situation.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Pandemic, Preparedness, Health sciences, Education.

How to Cite This:

Zaheer A. *Preparing for post COVID-19 stage*. Biomedica. 2020; 36 (COVID19-S2): 21-3.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has changed the world. The global community is taking its time to readjust. The doubts about traveling, commuting, and working together are taking its toll. The rise in anxiety, domestic violence, and agoraphobia are its telltale signs. The hope that comes out of this despair is how the global community is battling a pandemic. The new transnational and pan-institutional alliances are in place. The success stories of China, South Korea, and Germany have given everyone a reason to look beyond Corona Pandemic. *This write-up intends to look beyond the CORONA Pandemic in Pakistan with a perspective on health sciences education.*

The researchers are predicting 2022 as the year for the return of normalcy. Nevertheless, the year 2020 is stifling the economy. The low socio-economic segment of the society has suffered maximum. Closure of small businesses and job losses are widening the existing social inequalities still further. Currently and rightly, the focus is on human life, but in long terms, the tardiest recovery will be in education and research where 1.5 billion learners have been affected globally by the Pandemic.

Once the Pandemic is over, educational institutions, including the University of Health Sciences (UHS), may face many challenges, but all hope is not lost.

1. Secondary Pandemic of Mental Health

The fraternity of faculty, staff, and students will resume their interactive academic activities after being deprived of the solace of human contact for a reasonably long time. Even after the resumption, the social rituals of handshakes, high fives, and pats on the back will always attract skepticism.

Those amongst the fraternity already battling with overt or covert psychiatric challenges will be back with heightened intensity. The increased incidence of domestic violence and an unfortunate likely loss of a near or dear one may further complicate the things. Typically, academic institutions look up to their faculty for bailing them out of a crisis. However, the usual saviors are likely to be less productive, exhausted, and burnout themselves when the time comes.

Maintaining an institutional environment conducive for learning will be one of the critical Post COVID-19 challenges. Nevertheless, the Pandemic will leave not only with scars but many silver linings as well. The societies, including ours, have knitted well against the hazards of COVID-19 Pandemic. We empathize more strongly with victims of COVID-19 irrespective of their social class. The technology has made strong inroads into

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our teaching, learning, and training environments. It will stay and benefit the fraternity. The research which hitherto is aimed at the acquisition of qualification alone will become human-centered. Health Sciences Universities, including UHS, will start focusing more on Translational Research.

2. The Financial Crunch

University of Health Sciences and other institutions of Higher Education are likely to be in a financially fluid state once the COVID-19 Pandemic ends. Currently, Pakistan is spending 2.4% of its GDP on education. It is lowest in the region. The things will go murkier when students, state, and patrons of education institutions will find lower cash reserves to pursue the individual, institutional, and national academic pursuits. The financial fragility forecasted in preceding lines is not without its bright spots. The world has realized the importance of spending on Health. The global realization that the economic costs of a pandemic are huge as compared to investments in research and prevention will bolster spending on institutions of health and research. The spending will be coming from all around the globe. The academicians and researchers need to gear themselves for the opportunity when it comes their way. They have to be prepared in terms of research and academic infrastructure, as well as the ability to compete internationally for winning research grants. The opportunity is bound to come their way.

3. The Increase in Workload

Post-COVID-19 scenarios will witness the escalated workload on faculty. They will face the challenge of not only adjusting the academic calendar for the time lost to Pandemic but also adjusting the new enrolments for their academic pursuits. The apprehended dropout of students and their desire to return to mainstream education at a later stage will further enhance faculty workload.

4. Managerial Challenge

There is a strong need for a concomitant but continuous situation analysis as well as defining the roadmap for the future. The management in our

academic institutions usually restricts itself to everyday operations. *But not now.* The management needs to stay on top of the evidence being accumulated. It has to share its own experience with others and learn from their experiences as well. In these testing times, the faculty, staff, and students will be looking towards them for motivation and providing the social glue to move forward. The management needs to interact with stakeholders a lot more to step into the Post COVID-19 stages with policies in conformance with the challenges of that stage.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

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