

Handling COVID-19 Patient or COVID-19 Sample: What's More Stressful?

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ABSTRACT

People have suffered both physically and mentally from threatening situation of the emerging cases of Coronavirus in Pakistan. The health professionals who are directly involved in performing various blood tests on the samples of COVID-19 patient are almost equally in danger zone to get infected as much as the health care workers who treat them. The environmental contamination is higher in the hospitals and working medical staff should practice strict protective measures to overcome this psychological stress or mental trauma as it sub-optimizes a person's working capacity.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Health care workers, Contaminated specimen, Mental stress.

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There is a general air of dread within the whole community. People have suffered both physically and mentally from threatening situation of the emerging cases of Coronavirus in Pakistan. Some groups like front line health workers are wary of being isolated because of their exposure risk. Yet others are fearful about being separated from loved ones or not being able to protect them. Several families separated by borders because of work or education are anxious for their loved ones. Common symptoms of other health problems (e.g. fever) are also being mistaken for Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). There are various setups where professionals are facing these issues nowadays.¹

Health workers are generally more prone to be exposed by this virus. Those who are taking care of COVID-19 patients are in the most dangerous zone of infection by this virus. At the same time the

health professionals who are directly involved in performing various blood tests on the samples of COVID-19 patient are almost equally in danger zone to get infected as much as the health care workers who treat them.²

Health care workers have a higher risk of exposure and they have a chance to become a vector of onward transmission. Therefore, while performing various routine investigations on COVID-19 sample the person who handles it, is more likely to get infected due to direct contact of contaminated specimen. In China from the total reported COVID-19 cases, about 4% are health care workers, similarly in Europe 1% of the health care workers got infected among total cases of infected disease.³

Health officials around the world are being active in order to stop the virus from spreading.⁴ Efforts are not only to identify the exposed individuals but also to quarantine them in order to prevent the spread. In this mission the health officials too have got maximum chances to get infected with it. It is stated that COVID-19 pandemic is the most stressful period in the last decade especially for health professionals. This

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stress has induced impact of the COVID-19 pandemic causing serious psychological trauma to our health care front liners who treat them and who are handling the blood samples of these patients.⁵

According to one report 88% of health care workers reported experiencing moderate to extreme stress over the past few months according to a research COVID-19 was widely distributed in the air and on objects surfaces in both intensive care units and general ward which implemented a potential risk for health care workers.⁴ The environmental contamination is higher in the hospitals and working medical staff should practice strict protective measures to overcome this psychological stress or mental trauma as it sub optimizes a person's working quality. Lastly further research is needed to provide effective models to overcome that fear among health care workers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None to disclose.

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The author is a Histopathologist (MBBS; M.Phil.), working as a demonstrator in the Department of Pathology, Services Institute of Medical Sciences Lahore. Her research interests are female genital tract and breast pathology. She is actively engaged in pathology laboratory where her observation that health care workers experience stress and fear to get this highly infectious disease by performing various routine investigation on the sample of COVID -19, has led her to share her views with readers.