



NATURE'S CURVE BALL

Community Medicine

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KEYWORDS

When we start to believe that everything is now sorted, nature plays the curve ball. I had started getting a hold of my career. Child bearing was next in line. Work had picked up its momentum. News that did not bother me, was ignored - my work must go on. I am an obstetrician. curve balls at work isn't new for me. How difficult can it be to manage another virus outbreak? We dealt with malaria, dengue, chikungunya, swine flu in the past seasons. How different can this one be? But when one feels the roof above you shaking with doubt, your mentors who have experienced 3 decades and more of life than you, clueless, then the curve ball strikes one out. And this year we were playing against the nature- the strongest player of all.

We were preparing for an event planned for the international women's day (8th march, 2020), when the spread of coronavirus in India, Rajasthan and specifically in Jodhpur, my town, flashed in the news. Like I said, until it wasn't right at my door bothering me, I didn't care enough. That's where I was wrong. The event needs to stop, no gatherings allowed, probably there will be a national lockdown, were the follow-up news. Now the news got my attention, but I still remained calm on my seat. It still wasn't my door. And then fell the mega-bomb of news, people from Iran will be tested for covid-19 and be brought for quarantine at my workplace! And that's how one jumps off the seat with full alertness looking for your seniors to guide you and realize that they are as directionless as you are.

The confusion was everywhere. Policies were made and changed every other day. How to prepare for the unknown? Being a doctor, I wanted to believe in science and reasoning, but nothing was making sense. Typical human tendency- to blame anyone but themselves for the problem. Anyone from whom revenge could be taken. But how to blame the nature and take revenge? Or was it the nature taking revenge from humans?

Everything needed to protect ourselves and our families was done. Never before did I ever look into the pore size of the face masks, but now I knew all about it. Clean everything you touch- done. Buy sanitizers, soon there will not be any left in the market- done. Wear N95 masks- done. The fear was so much that we all convinced ourselves to wash vegetables with soap and water before cooking. The online market flooded with "vegetable detergents" and vegetable cleaning devices. It was a frenzy.

The lockdown was announced in India. The roads were blocked. All we could see was clear sky and clean and quiet roads. All we could hear were the birds chirping and occasional sound of an ambulance siren. But my work as an obstetrician, never stopped. Who can delay the nature's call? Those newborns had no idea what world they were getting into. The confusion and discussion among the medical societies continued on how to adapt to the covid environment and stay safe. Had everything being advised, followed judiciously, the doctor, patient and the machines would have ended up being in separate plastic bubbles. People were scared. They all talked about social distancing and sanitization, but no one wanted to follow. Rather got offended, if they were asked to distance. Corona virus awoke the old customs of untouchables. Hence, the offence.

They said doctors are the warriors. But the warriors were scared too. To work in covid-ward and be quarantined for 15 days thereafter or to work as far away from covid- wards as possible, every day without any

quarantine was the choice to be made. Back then quarantine was taken as "leave" from work, like it was a way to get freedom. So, the sense of grandeur and sudden respect from the society as warriors did not feel very right. There wasn't much of a choice we were given. We needed supplementary support more than the words of wisdom. Since all elective work had stopped there was ample time to analyze the health care system in my country and also the others. Media flashed the videos made by the medical staff from different parts of the world. The condition seemed more or less the same in every country. The comments about humanity and human race, in a larger context, never felt so real until this day. This time, truly, we are all in it together fighting from the same side. The doctors took oath, to serve humanity in sickness and health and we were abiding to it, not by force but by will. It took a while to understand that there is no point in being a resistance. If this is the first time for us, the same is for the leader of our country and the others. Then why fight our system and try and blame the authority? Had there been no leader, the system would have been a bigger mess. Every emergency drill we were taught had a leader taking charge and directing the workforce to achieve the goal. Today, all the countries standing strong in this pandemic have strong leaders taking charge of their workforce. No one knows what course the nature would take, but we all have to stay together and work in one direction- to save humans.

Now the lockdown has been lifted in my country. People are out on the roads, meeting each other, standing in conglomerations, like nothing happened. These are the same people who, few months back, washed their vegetables with soap and water. Like lockdown was for the government and not people's safety. On the other hand, hospitals and smaller clinics, till now, were modifying work pattern by applying minimalism and triage. The ideas were not even universally accepted and the orders for relaxing lockdown, blazed. The cycle had to repeat again. More modifications for optimizing regular out-patient care without getting infected by coronavirus is our new agenda. The out-patient department (OPD) flourished with patients with minor ailments or simply counselling for infertility during covid era. These must be pressing issues for the patient, but anything which isn't an emergency, appears non-essential. Maintaining the fine balance between essential and non-essential medical aid is tiresome. On social media everyone has an opinion on how to distance and prevent oneself from the virus but reality looks very different. Or may be its just me, looking from the bird's- eye view, on the society as a whole, wondering, isn't such a big life-threatening event enough to make permanent lifestyle modifications in the society or will it need another generation to change the attitude of humans in the society among each other or towards our leader?