



AULA MAGNA

Special Issue on COVID-19



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Message from the Pro Chancellor: Beyond the Barriers of the Pandemic

The pandemic that brought everything to a grinding halt has taught us to deal with the "new normal" and move on accepting the inevitable. First and foremost, my heart goes out to everyone who's been impacted by the virus, to whom I offer my prayers for a full recovery. My sincere gratitude to all our doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers who are on the frontline, working tirelessly for the people in need. Their efforts are noteworthy and we are truly inspired.

COVID-19 crisis has impacted the whole scholastic system upside down posing a huge challenge to the education sector. Educational institutions including ours were shut down but backup actions were launched to continue the delivery of education in a way that would allow the granting of credentials. At MAHE, we were quick to adapt to the unfamiliar order by moving classes and administrative tasks online. To keep up the momentum and motivation in a virtual world, MAHE has been engaging its students and staff remotely through online platforms like Microsoft Teams and Impartus to ease their academic burden. Online lectures have emerged as the go-to solution in the prevailing situation although it is not a panacea unless implemented wisely.

Students and staff have constantly engaged themselves in supporting this fight against the pandemic. MAHE organized the online Manipal COVID challenge, a remote engagement with faculty and students to come up with innovative ideas on themes related to the pandemic like washable cloth masks for the general population, sterilizing used N-95 masks for reuse, development of biodegradable gowns and PPEs, protective face shields, etc. A team of researchers has successfully developed a 'ventilator splitter' to help our hospitals tend to a lar-



Dr HS Ballal
Pro Chancellor
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Manipal COVID Challenge

ger number of patients. The police department, with an engineering student of ours, has distributed homemade sanitizers to the underprivileged. An anesthesiologist demonstrated intubation and exudation in COVID-19 suspects and patients using a plastic sheet, an idea that was well-received. Our nursing faculty have been counseling and working with the community nursing officers in Manipur providing guidance and instructions for safety practices to deal with COVID-19 patients. A team of three students from Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT) has won the COVID-19 Hackathon organized by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA.

MAHE has taken necessary steps to combat the challenges posed by the pandemic and is committed to serve the society. In association with Udupi District Administration and Government of Karnataka, MAHE has dedicated Dr TMA Pai Hospital, a secondary care unit operational at Udupi exclusively to treat the COVID-19 patients since April 2020. MAHE takes pride in having trained many doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and rest of the healthcare workers who are now on the front-line and selflessly serving the community during these trying times.

As the crisis continues, universities must learn from each other and share their best practices to deliver education and reopen campuses safely and effectively. I hope we overcome this together by supporting each other and staying connected. My best wishes to all of you and your families. Stay safe and keep up the good work.

Student Support Center Prioritizing Mental Health



The Student Support Centre (SSC) at the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) was set up in April 2017 as a confidential service devoted to supporting the emotional wellness of students at Manipal. Keeping in mind that going to large hospitals often distresses students and dissuades them from seeking

help, SSC is located in a quiet residential area that ensures privacy and accessibility. Services at SSC are covered by student insurance or university funds making it accessible for all students.

SSC offers psychotherapy sessions with qualified psychologists, and if required arranges for consultations with visiting psychiatrists from Kasturba Hospital with consent. They conduct awareness campaigns and outreach sessions across institutes and extends the university's efforts towards supporting differently-abled students. Modelled along the lines of mental health resources at the best international universities, the SSC at Manipal has been recognized for its pioneering work with mental health in higher education.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed daunting challenges to young people around the world and MAHE has taken several initiatives to ensure the physical and mental health of its students. Through the uncertainties of the academic calendar of 2020, SSC continues to offer its services through online consultations and is working with students in exploring and consolidating proactive mechanisms towards mental wellness.

Healthcare Professionals Coping with the New Normal



Dr Shashikiran Umakanth, MD, FRCP EDIN
 Medical Superintendent
 Professor & Head, Department of Medicine
 Nodal Officer, Dedicated COVID-19 Hospital
 Dr. TMA Pai Hospital, Udupi
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Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) designated Dr TMA Pai Hospital, Udupi as a dedicated COVID 19 hospital from April 1, 2020. In this interview, Dr Shashikiran brings to us an insider's perspective on how healthcare professionals have been dealing with the new normal.

COVID brought in a number of changes into all of our lives. In the light of this statement how has adapting with the 'New Normal' been, in regard to the hospital?

Everything has changed. Since our hospital is a dedicated COVID-19 hospital, we haven't seen outpatients for more than 6 months. Patients, who were on regular follow-up so far are feeling lost, and so are we. Inpatient care is vastly different too, as we can meet and examine patients only with PPE. This has neg-

atively affected the personal rapport and bond we used to have with patients earlier. Due to strict infection control measures, having get-togethers for even tea and coffee with our colleagues is a thing of the past.

How are people from the healthcare sector dealing effectively with personal stress during these testing times?

Healthcare professionals have always faced the risk of infection, disease, and death. However, what has added to the stress during this pandemic is the contagiousness of this virus, resulting in a very high level of risk for our family members too. We have taken extreme precautions to reduce the risk of transmission that includes change in our lifestyle, especially with physical distancing at home. Over a period, this distancing has itself become a source of stress too.

Coping with such stress is multifaceted; complete dedication to our work, deriving satisfaction from the improvement of our sick patients, and avoidance of infection in our near and dear have significantly contributed to this process of coping. Gradual acceptance of the situation and its outcomes have also played a part in this process of coping.

You have been an important member dealing with the COVID scenario in the hospital. How has Udupi's fight with the pandemic been like?

Overall, it is excellent. On a scale of 10, I would give Udupi a 9 for handling COVID-19 so far.

The contribution of MAHE in the management of COVID-19 in Udupi district has been phenomenal. We had a unique model of public-private partnership during this pandemic. MAHE offered an entire hospital to the district authorities. Dr TMA

Pai Hospital, where I work, is still a dedicated COVID-19 hospital and was the only hospital treating COVID-19 patients for many months. The team of physicians, infectious disease specialists, intensivists and other healthcare professionals including nurses, technicians and other support staff did a phenomenal job giving high priority to professional patient care and infection control. The district administration and district health authorities also did this tremendous job of surveillance testing, contact tracing and containment. Together, this combination helped in controlling the virus for a long time, giving everyone enough time to face the pandemic

Can you enlighten us about the environment in which doctors, nurses and hospital staff have been working and the kind of challenges faced by them daily?

We are walking on a thin line – balancing between the patient care, personal care & family protection. Six months of such work, and now it seems almost natural. But looking back, the changes in our working environment are astronomical. Earlier, we used to work in our own clothes, like any other professional. Nurses and housekeeping staff had their uniforms too. Now, all of us change to hospital scrubs after reaching the hospital. We cannot just walk into the patient areas like earlier. It requires a 10-minute ritual of wearing a PPE correctly, while being observed by one of our colleagues. After carefully removing the PPE (that is when many healthcare workers get exposed to the virus), we have to take a bath in the hospital before getting back into our clothes and going home.

Maintaining medical records is also a challenge. Documentation is done over the phone, since patient data is collected in PPE, but records are maintained in the clean areas. Patient relatives are not allowed in wards like earlier. So the non-medical care and responsibility also falls on the hospital and workers, including food, fruits, snacks, and various other personal requirements of the pat-

ients. Interpersonal interaction between colleagues is also restricted to limit the transmission between healthcare professionals in view of asymptomatic infections.

Another challenge revolving around the Pandemic is the amount of misinformation currently spreading about the virus. Could you comment on that?

It is very unfortunate that there is a pandemic of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 that has added fuel to the raging fire of the pandemic itself. Miscreants have misled the innocent public at almost every step of public health education and administrative effort to contain the pandemic. Through campaigns to counter such misinformation, many individuals and agencies have been trying to limit this, but regrettably fake news tends to spread 5-6 times faster than truth.

Due to a relaxation of rules and restrictions, the scenario is much different now than when the Lockdown was imposed. What are the current responsibilities of the people right now?

Each person must consider their roles and responsibilities. Personal hygiene in the form of frequent hand washing or hand rub, proper use of masks, physical distancing, avoidance of gatherings (especially indoor gatherings) is the duty of every individual. The focus on preventing transmission to the elderly and vulnerable must be given high priority.

Any advice for the readers on how to stay positive in this dire time, and not let it take a toll on our well-being.

Individually, we must follow adequate precautions until the end of this pandemic before we can resume our usual carefree life. We must focus on basic necessities and have reasonable goals. Every pandemic in the history of humanity has ended after some time. This too shall end.

COVID-19 Vaccine: India's Status in the Global Race



Dr Anitha J
Assistant Professor
Manipal Institute of Virology
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Researchers around the world are working round-the-clock to find an effective vaccine against SARS-CoV-2, the respiratory virus causing the COVID 19 pandemic. COVID-19 vaccine research is happening at a breakneck speed with ~140 vaccines in early development, and dozens in clinical trials however, much more remains to be done before marketing the vaccine a) clinical trials need to show the vaccine is safe and provokes an immune response b) regulatory bodies must approve the vaccine for use; and c) large-scale production plans for a cost-effective vaccine, must be developed to make the vaccine available globally.

Since India is the world's largest producer of vaccines, Dr Barghava (Director, ICMR), emphasizes on India's "moral responsibility" to hasten the process of

vaccine development. The Indigenous vaccines, Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech in partnership with National Institute of Virology and ICMR, and ZyCoV-D by Zydus Cadila respectively, have completed the phase I trial successfully and entered phase II trials. If trials succeed, an Indian vaccine is likely to become widely available in the first half of 2021.

A landmark collaboration has been established between the Serum Institute of India (SII), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gavi-The Vaccine Alliance, to produce up to 100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses as early as 2021 for India and other low- and middle-income countries. The aim is to support the production of two promising vaccines by University of Oxford and Novavax on the condition that the Pune-based firm prices the two vaccines at a maximum of \$3 per dose."India has demonstrated consistent capability in delivering on low-cost and high-quality medical research, while also maintaining technical and scientific rigour. ICMR is deeply supportive of our cutting edge vaccine research and manufacturing prowess, of which SII is one prominent example. This partnership signifies yet another step in India's efforts to bolster the fight against this global pandemic" said Dr Balram Bhargava, Director, ICMR.

SII is investing around 100 million USD on the potential COVID-19 vaccine. The company has partnered with Oxford University and AstraZeneca, a research based Biopharmaceutical Company, UK to ensure supply of the vaccine (AZD1222) that will be called Covishield in India. "The rampant spread of the virus has rendered the entire world in an unimaginable halt of uncertainty. To ensure maximum immunization coverage and contain the pandemic, it is important to make sure that the most remote and poorest countries of the world have access to affordable cure and preventive measures. Through this association, we seek to ramp up our constant efforts to save the lives of millions of people from this dreadful disease." said Mr Adar Poonawalla, CEO, SII. While India is expected to have a major role in development and production of the COVID-19 vaccine, aligning with the global needs to ensure a fair distribution of the vaccine between countries, and within India, will be a major challenge.

Social Stigma associated with COVID-19

A brief account of COVID responder's journey

What drove you to declare that you were positive?

A short reply would be “To spread positivity in the community”. It was an honest communication to all those who had met me to refrain them from meeting other people. It was a conscious decision to spread awareness and protect fellow beings. It would be irresponsible of me to hide my illness and would have harmed my own people.

Going through the COVID illness, what are the lessons that you have learnt from this journey?

The biggest lesson was to stay positive. When you are under isolation, you are all by yourself. In today's chaotic world “me” time is a blessing in disguise. This has taught me to be considerate to fellow beings, sick or otherwise. When sick, stay confined for other's protection. Only your body knows how to fight this menace. As much as the frontline warriors are managing the sick, the sick themselves are involved in fighting this invisible war. And as ironic it may seem, it is true that this is the only war that you win by strict division.

What are the major challenges in dealing with infectious disease like COVID?

One of the major challenges is dealing with deep-seated stigma around affected populations. Stigma creates an irreconcilable difference between being acceptable versus being prejudiced. People are concealing symptoms. They are hesitating to seek medical care.

Beyond that, doctors and medical staff are being asked to vacate their rented homes and in some instances are even attacked. There is a constant fear of the unknown which has led to misinformation and bias. In some, there is an increased sense of emotional isolation. In some cases it has worsened pre-existing psychiatric illness such as depression.



Dr Raghu Radhakrishnan

Director International Collaborations
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What can be done to reduce COVID-19 stigma and show solidarity during this unprecedented time?

Efforts must be directed towards creating awareness. Education helps dispel harmful stereotypes. Within this tsunami of information, we need to check the validity of information before its use. WHO uses its information network called EPI-WIN to give everyone access to timely and easy-to-understand advice and information on public health emergency.

Thank the healthcare workers and others who are tirelessly working. Show gratitude to all those people who continue their essential jobs to help you and your community. Let's support our family, friends, neighbours and frontline responders in the fight against COVID-19. We may not find a cure soon but till then we need to treat corona patients with respect and dignity.

Manipal COVID Challenge



Ajil Saji



Noyal B



Suraj P N



Varun S

Faces behind the making
of 100% Biodegradable PPE kit

A team of students from different colleges of Manipal Academy of Higher Education got first place in a hackathon competition held by the MAHE Innovation Centre called "Manipal COVID Challenge", where participants were expected to come up with innovative projects to help with the pandemic.

The team was led by Noyal Babu (MCHP) and consisted of Varun Suresh (KMC), Ajil Saji (MCHP) and Suraj PN (MIT). Professors Dr Shivanand Bhushan and Sibi Oommen were involved throughout the project, providing both mentorship and support. Together, they conducted surveys to understand the problems faced by health professionals who used a PPE kit. Based on the responses collected, they attempted to build a project which could help frontline workers do their jobs more efficiently. Despite the colleges being closed and physical meetings made impossible, they conducted frequent video calls, with the prototype being continually evaluated by the members.

Moving on to the hybrid biohazmat suit, it is in its essence, a 'single-piece head-to-toe gown'. The gown is made with materials that prevent conditions like breathlessness, wheezing, rashes, etc. It also has a respirator consisting of many filters which can prevent viral entry by purifying the air, as well as, removing foreign bodies entering the airways.

Beyond being a functional prototype, the PPE kit's most notable advantage is that it is 100% biodegradable and economical, with a reusable respirator. This was done to tackle the pressing issue of waste management regarding PPE disposal, one that has increased insurmountably during the lockdown. Through its minimal cost and functionality, the bio-hazmat suit developed by this team of students is a viable option for frontline workers who require a constant change of PPE equipment.

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