

## Reflections

**You can do the best....It's just a matter of time****Dr. Hina Latif***Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine, King Edward Medical University, Lahore*

December 2019: What's in the news? A new deadly virus of SARS origin? Reported from Wuhan, China was the hot topic of discussion after Ward Round. A new virus which has crippled the medical field and the whole economy of the country even with overwhelming nagging thoughts of this COVID-19 I tried to console myself by saying not all SARS epidemics stroked my country hopefully it won't be here too.

**30th January 2020:** The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. The reported events in China, US, UK seemed as remote as ones that might take place on Mars. Hospitals over burdened, healthcare system choking everywhere, Enormous structures built to confine anyone with a fever: a stunning state response. All transportation was shut down & lock down in such a busy parts of the world was something new to all of us: something we all never even imagined once. "This virus has crippled the biggest economies and the countries with the best health system, disastrous it would be to have it here". So far away, so foreign to me but just the thought of such a situation in my beloved country gave me a shudder. That very night a deadly virus COVID-19 of SARS origin was the Mister Big on my desk.

**26th February 2020:** First case of COVID-19 reported in Karachi, Pakistan. Being agitated and distraught with just the thought of havoc created by COVID-19 everywhere and With some fear in my eyes: "oh no here it is, I hope Punjab Won't be affected much as some bird flu virus cases mostly reported in Karachi only". Shaking my head I tried to negated all those negative thoughts.

**18th March:** Life is beautiful so does shopping for a girl that too with your best friend. I was wandering in a stationary shop in the evening with my best friend when I got a call from my Head of department. "You need to see a patient of Covid-19 admitted to our hospital "I just screamed "seriously sir? Do I need to Don PPE as well? "Oh yes off course you have to" was the reply. Saying good bye to my all shopping plans and with so much fears bubbling inside of a highly contagious new virus, I stepped out of the shop to head to my hos-



pital to see that 1st patient of COVID-19 in my hospital. A cascade of fears jumbled up inside: Why always me? Am I the only one in the hospital? Oh I need to stay away from my only parent in case I catch it from my patient, isolation after visiting my patient, no more weekend fun with family n friends. Life was all turning grey for me which was displaying a rainbow a moment before. With a cloudy mind n revising some donning steps I stepped into the isolation area, donned and here I was knocking at the door of my patient with a new disease which I have only read in books so far or heard via news of such cases in other parts of the world while pandemic was already declared. Anyone can relate to the anxiety of treating something you are not expert at. With mixed feelings and pipe dreaming of learning from a new challenge, I knocked at the door. That was the last weakest moment I had because feelings of I can do something for my patient kicked in more fiercely, making me satisfying my patient and easing his anxiety by listening to all his disease complaints. While Doffing my PPE, it wasn't the same doctor who was a bit shaky a moment before but a doctor with some pride of "I

CAN HELP my patients, Together We are and together we will defeat it.”

**A Few Months Later:** Standing amid ICU, beds are full, so many patients with COVID pneumonia and ARDS all around, striving for Life, air hunger twirling, death lurking from the dark dusky and shady corners, beeps of ventilators making it all more daunting, every other patient with whitewashed lungs and here I am with a muddled up mind letting in my thoughts of despair “would I be able to see most of them few days later? A deep whisper ...not Many I am sure” can I do something? Am I doing the best for them? i will try my best till the last moment that was the little comforting conversation I heard my heart n brain just had.

‘So we met few days ago, how do you feeling right now?’ I asked a young lady who clung to life after fighting on ventilator for a breath for more than a month. She just nodded her head while panting heavily with a glimpse of smile for fraction of a second around the corners of her pursed lips but that was the moment I always longed for being a doctor: that always keep you going and make you a helping hand even more than that for your patients. With a little moment of contentment and trying to settle my remonstrating heart by saying I can do little best I moved to the next bed.

On approaching a middle aged patient badly striving for air, with CPAP attached and in quite shaggy appearance, another one with poor prognosis, I was about to ask about his symptoms but what I heard 1st “Dr. please put this jam on my bread?” I just inquired are you diabetic sir? “Yes but I only like this jam n bread from the whole meals served throughout the day”. Staff nurse pointed towards uncontrolled diabetes Chart as he was having steroids as well, but he was still waiting for me to spread the jam on slice. Ignoring all the questioning eyes of my team member I did it after changing my gloves saying in a quavering voice “Let him enjoy the only pleasure he has at the moment”. My heart whispered; is that the only thing you can do for your patients? You can do best?

“Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability” rightly said by William Osler. “Not all things are in your control “a phrase which is the true depiction of this pandemic we all are facing. A day

later, that ‘bread n jam’ guy was all frail, drowsy and too weak to speak, owing every breath to CPAP, sight of whom tore my heart apart. Standing by his bed side, I just waited for a single word from him but he was all off color badly caught in the toils of COVID pneumonia. Gloomy and down casted, while moving towards the staircase a teenager guy rushed into me “Doctor please wait a moment, howz my father? Please say something, his blood pressure and oxygen is not ok. I am his only Son, the last bed you just visited sir, please tell me the truth please. “Oh young man...He will be fine soon”; patting on his shoulder all I had were few words of false hope to assuage his pain. Deep down my heart just missed a beat and warned “Doctor: another wishful thinking!! Hmmm??”

There is no future that I can know for certain, not for him and not for us. We were just here, together. I considered forcing words through my mask, to comfort that little young man concerned for his father, but I found I cannot break the silence this time. I tried instead to just allow myself to be still, downhearted I walked away.

Three Weeks Later: Again on round of my COVID patients, with feelings of despair n hope to do best for my patients, I was moving on from bed to bed, when I came across a fresh looking enthusiastic middle aged man, on low flow oxygen, combed hair with clean clothes all set to go home, asking for a repeat PCR, guiding his fellows around and reading out loud that very day newspaper for them. He doesn’t have much air hunger that’s why pouring out the vibes and energy of a usual human being my brain vocalized. “How are you SIR?” I inquired. “Oh doctor ... a little pause he had....you are here, may I request you to spread jam on my slice? You know I am an old man and I forget about my diabetes but I will have it only if u allow me, last time I had it with your permission” With glittering eyes and gratitude sneak peaking from the corners and a face beaming with smile he asked me while I knew he can do it now easily by himself. “Omg is that you sir??” I responded bluntly as I was shocked to see him in such a good shape and wasn’t expecting him here. With teary eyes and a feeling of gratification: I said “yes why not sir, let’s celebrate”. And my heart pounding, whispering and chirping yes you can do best ....yes you can!!!