

Teamwork, Morale Building and Empathy-Promoting Mental Well Being an Important Administrative Tool for Good Leadership in This COVID Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed have had a significant impact on businesses and jobs in every sector. Governments and hospitals everywhere have tried to prepare themselves to deal with this global crisis. COVID preparedness has been the priority for health organizations worldwide and new guidelines and protocols are being devised to ensure this. Occupational health is being given prime importance as a safe and healthy work environment is what every healthcare worker needs and deserves for the service they are providing in these difficult times. Various measures like social distancing have been taken to ensure healthcare workers' (HCW) safety and prevent overburdening of hospitals. The healthcare sector is at the epicenter of this unprecedented challenge, and healthcare workers have risen to the occasion and provided their support in every way possible. The stress of working for days together coupled with the emotional burden of staying away from family has had a toll on every healthcare worker at some point in time. But their determination and dedication towards this noble profession is what helps them to move ahead despite of the hurdles. It is the responsibility of the hospital administrators and managers to make sure that this job is done. Efficient leadership is what this situation needed, and our administration has provided the same diligently. Besides ensuring the safety of staff by providing personal protective devices, hospital

administrators had to protect staff morale as well. The entire healthcare staff is risking themselves and their families and without the right motivation and support, the healthcare system will buckle down. Our management realized this need and undertook some special steps to ensure the mental wellbeing of their staff.

We will be discussing the various measures taken at our tertiary care hospital to ensure staff safety, maintain morale and create a healthy work environment.

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APEX COMMITTEE

A committee was set up to plan, provide guidance and overlook the progress of the entire process.

The key members of this Apex committee were few of the mentioned in **Table 1** but not limited to them.

Table 1. Key members of this Apex Committee.

Management 'Executive Director, Director & Chief Operating Officer: Their leadership and support ensured that all departments worked collectively.

Director of Medical Services, Medical Superintendent, they organized and led the daily meetings and finalized decisions based on inputs from the multidisciplinary team. Their excellent leadership and decision-making were pivotal to the smooth functioning during the whole preparedness process. MS, AMS studied the guidelines from Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), State Government guidelines, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, WHO, ICMR, CDC and implemented them effectively.

Ensuring the safety of staff was very crucial to this plan. Multiple Trainings were arranged.

Director of Critical Care, and Department Heads of Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Clinicians: These were the departments dealing with the patients directly. Coordination between various department heads, administrators, and their staff was essential for ensuring success of the planning process.

This is a token of Leaderships mentioned, we owe the credit to all Head of Departments, including (but not limited to) the Chief Nursing Officer & Accreditation coordinator, Quality Manager, Head of Hospital ‘Lab & Hospital Infection Control Officer; including their colleagues, each staff of the hospital who contributed in this pandemic.

The various methods we used to achieve a healthy workplace environment will be discussed under these headings: TEAMS (**Table 2**).

This pandemic has brought challenges along with it, but our hospital staff has worked together as a team and handled this crisis very efficiently. All the staff has supported each other and motivated each other to do their best with constant support and guidance from the administration.

Table 2. Ways to Boost Morale and increase Staff Productivity.

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T-Transparency
E- Emotional and Psychological support
A-Availability
M-Motivation
S-Safety

TRANSPARENCY

The COVID pandemic has brought with it many uncertainties in terms of job securities, salaries, health, and safety. The situation is evolving & very dynamic. Everyone has questions which probably do not have correct answers, but these questions need to be answered. The management staff arranged regular calls and virtual meetings to address various queries and problems faced by all healthcare personnel. Communication is the key to all problems; staff should know what to expect at all times to be prepared to deal with it. Regular briefings were held to ensure everyone knew current statistics and progress and an attempt was made to keep everyone posted about new guidelines and directives provided by the Government and Authorities like MoHFW [1], MCGM, WHO [2], ICMR [3] and to discuss progress, daily activities, and new ideas to tackle this crisis. Regular updates were provided to all staff, no matter how small.

EMPATHY-EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

When the hospital administration decided to provide services for COVID patients, a sense of fear and apprehension was there in every single healthcare worker. The risk of getting infected, uncertainty of treatment and cure statistics, infomedics, complications and rising numbers were just some of the worries on everyone’s minds besides the pain of being away from families and risk carrying the infection home. However, the administration provided excellent guidance and motivation and urged all the frontline workers to give back to the society. They spoke to each resident doctor/nurse and every other HCW in the frontline and assured them a safe work environment. The administration arranged for providing Counselling services to all those who could not deal with the situation. Social distancing created

some hurdles in this but various other **methods** like WhatsApp, skype, and video calls were used.

AVAILABILITY AND INSPIRATION

The management and administrative leaders were always approachable for any issue of concern. WhatsApp groups were created for quick addressal of problems. A good leader is one who can inspire. The administrators themselves set an example by being the first to be in the frontline against this pandemic. This was the best form of motivation one could provide. When leaders jump in, their army follows. Administrative staff including the COO, MD, MS, CNO, Quality Manager, Consultants and departmental HODS would take daily rounds, conduct daily audits and paid attention to the smallest of details. Multiple meetings and discussions were held for updating measures of safety, staff counselling and guidelines of disease management. HODS would make sure to speak to all resident doctors daily and address their issues promptly.

MOTIVATION

Staff motivation is a usually a topic for discussion in conferences and meetings but in this pandemic, its implementation has played a very crucial role at multiple levels.

The entire healthcare industry is going through a rough time and has been under tremendous pressure. Social distancing and quarantine measures have had an impact on psychology. Keeping the staff motivated throughout the whole process was very crucial. The management was trying to keep the morale high by arranging regular counselling sessions for all staff. Entertainment activities like singing sessions were organized for staff on weekends to lift their spirit. Video calls and other virtual methods of contact were advised between healthcare staff and supervisors for any guidance

needed. WhatsApp groups were created for constant communication between healthcare staff and administrators, where review messages with kind words from treated patients and supervisors were shared timely to motivate all staff. Every life saved is the biggest incentive for a healthcare worker and a word of gratitude just helps them to go on.

Supervisors from all departments regularly held meetings to boost morale and acknowledge their hard work.

Medical Superintendent, Director of Medical services and the Management provided immense support and encouragement to all the Consultants, Clinical Associates, Residents involved in comprehensive treatment.

APPRECIATION

The dedication and perseverance of all the healthcare staff was timely appreciated. On Doctor's day keeping in mind the inclination of the younger generation towards social media, the administration took to creative ideas to show their gratitude and admiration for their work. Our corona warriors have fought with great courage and valor in this war against COVID. Messages and videos posted by recovered COVID patients helped all our staff to do what they do best with all their heart. These words of praise in patient reviews were always applauded by higher authorities and all their efforts were constantly being acknowledged. Our motto 'A Passion for Healing' truly made sense in the current scenario. One life saved is all that counts. An e-certificate of appreciation was awarded to all those who selflessly worked during these difficult times (**Figures 1 and 2**).



Figure 1. Certificate of appreciation.

STAFF SAFETY

Various measures were taken to ensure the safety of all healthcare staff. Screening and social distancing were undertaken at every department in the hospital right from the

entry (**Figure 3**). Visitors (except those with elderly and children) were not allowed so that the disease transmission could be slowed down. All elective investigations and procedures were postponed. Only emergency and semi-

emergency patients were managed, to prevent overburdening staff and services. Suspected patients were given a red band

so that necessary precautions could be taken while dealing with them. Special training sessions and educational videos



Figure 2. Creatives made for Doctor's Day.

were arranged for staff working in COVID wards and those dealing with patient triage, segregation, and management. Suspected patients were directly sent to special COVID accident and emergency department so that exposure to other staff and patients could be avoided. All healthcare staff was provided the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) as per guidelines. Those posted in COVID wards were provided rest after a duty of 14 days and food with accommodation by the hospital administration.

One of the challenges was dealing with accidental exposure of staff and HCW becoming COVID positive. They were provided support in every way possible, clinical management and psychological (**Table 3**).

A Staff Health and Safety team was established by the administration.

The team comprised of the following: Headed by



Figure 3. Screening and Triage at hospital entry.

- Senior Consultant (Director of Critical care/ Intensivist)
- Senior Manager from HR

- Quality Manager

Supported by Consultants, Nursing Coordinators, Managers from Medical Administration.

Table 3. Measures taken for staff safety.

Check in with staff frequently during this time; set an expectation for managers to reach out to staff frequently.
Make sure staff is provided with the resources and support they need
Escalate and resolve any issues on an urgent basis to the Unit Head and Medical Director.
Deal with Exposure Management, Quarantine and Clinical Guidance in case staff gets infected.
Find ways to show support and care for staff. They should be able to reach out to the team for any issue or concern.
Make sure staff is taking care of themselves and their families. Provide counselling referrals for those who need to deal with their stress, burnout or feeling overwhelmed. Ensure staff can access food, refreshments, transportation etc.
Recognize and engage staff: Find ways to acknowledge, motivate and appreciate them.
Set up a buddy system, where two employees' partner together to support each other, and monitor each other's stress, workload, and safety.
To conduct daily audits and prompt closure of the Audit findings

Objectives imparted to the Staff Health and Staff Safety Team

Prophylaxis: All healthcare personnel were given Hydroxychloroquine prophylaxis by the hospital administration.

Personal protective equipment (PPE): Appropriate PPE was provided to all HCWs and regular training sessions were held for donning/doffing of PPE techniques. Regular/surprise audits and CCTV footage analysis was also done to ensure proper techniques were being adopted. Safety of their staff was the hospitals prime concern every step of the way.

Staff wellbeing: Holistic support was given to all staff by the COVID team supervisors and administrators. All the needs and problems of staff were addressed including financial stability and job security along with safety.

TRAINING, AUDIT, RETRAINING

Training had to be provided for all healthcare staff for their safety including infection control policies, management guidelines and PPE use.

All departments were provided training:

- ❖ Consultants, clinical associates, residents, and interns
- ❖ Nursing staff-safety,
- ❖ Housekeeping staff
- ❖ Security personnel
- ❖ COVID Screening team-screening and Triage
- ❖ Staff safety TEAM.

The adequacy of training was judged by continuous, surprise Audits of Staff Health & Staff safety team and regular feedbacks. Reinforcement training sessions were conducted regularly.

On job training was preferred as it allowed for an interactive session for resolution of queries. Detailed presentations with videos and graphics were made in English & Marathi for better understanding.

INNOVATION

COVID 19 has challenged our workplaces in unprecedented ways, administrators and leaders needed to devise new strategies and build new partnerships to make sure the staff has all the resources required. Our hospital administrators tried to innovate and modify processes already being followed according to new guidelines. New standardized operating procedures were formed by the administration for management of patients during investigations like CT (Computed Tomography) scan and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and patients coming in for chemotherapy and hemodialysis. Special corridor was created for patient transfers to imaging departments. Innovating new methods and formulae of computational analysis like duality theorems ensure that computational procedures can be considerably reduced. Duality theorems further yield other powerful theorems. These concepts are used in various aspects of medicine as well for research and development of newer methods of treatment and investigations [4-6].

TEAMWORK

► Cross-departmental Collaboration

Inter-departmental meetings were held with administrative staff daily where representatives from different teams would identify challenges and ways to deal with them. The courage and dedication of our onsite teammates helped inspire everyone across the organization. Teams worked with occupational safety experts to ensure that our supply chains for appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitization materials were intact, including building relationships with of PPE. PPE and disinfection material

supplies availability has been critical in successfully handling the crisis.

► **Buddy system**

A buddy system was setup so that people could support each other. The goals of the buddy system were to:

- Get to know each other. Talk about background, interests, hobbies, and family. Identify each other’s strengths and weaknesses.
- Keep an eye on each other. Try to work in the same location if you can.
- Set up times to check-in with each other. Listen carefully and share experiences and feelings. Acknowledge tough situations and recognize accomplishments, even small ones.
- Offer to help with basic needs such as transportation.
- Monitor each other’s workloads. Encourage each other to take breaks.
- Communicate basic needs and challenges to leadership – make your buddy feel “safe” to speak up.

Technological assistance

The administration has actively tried to invest in new technologies like portable CT scanners and artificial intelligence based deep learning software which will add value in the current scenario for patient segregation, management, and treatment. Use of remote access for radiological reporting and teleconsultation for physician consults has helped in reducing burden on doctors as it helps reducing patient contact and thus the risk. Hospitals across the globe have started investing in artificial intelligence (AI) and deep learning technologies. AI has seen a new level of need and acceptance in countries like India where it is still in its new-born phase. Investigations like CT scan and X-ray are making use of AI for identifying and triaging COVID patients in areas without access to diagnostic facilities. Several developments in geometric structure of Banach spaces have found applications in other fields like medicine, economics and natural sciences besides mathematics. New innovations using deep learning technologies and artificial intelligence will require an understanding of concepts like these [7]. New technologies are being devised every day in the medical field. Technologies like artificial intelligence will see a growing trend in the future to come. Understanding these new mathematical programs and solutions will gradually gain importance for doctors as well.

What do hospital administrators need to realize?

Our hospital administration has tried to provide efficient and effective leadership in the most diligent way possible. All the managers and administrators were always available and approachable for any kind of assistance needed by any staff.

Besides qualities like delegation, supervision, conflict management, providing inspiration, a good leader also needs a good balance of emotional intelligence (EI)/emotional quotient (EQ) [8]. To excel, managers need to develop a balance of strengths across the various EI competencies. Qualities like empathy, motivation and teamwork are necessary ingredients for a successful business operation. This holds true for hospitals as well especially in the current scenario. All administrators need to do is ‘Be there’ (Table 4).

Table 4. Emotional Quotient-Set of Competencies.

Self-awareness	Know your qualities, strengths
Self-management	Trust worthiness, self-control
Social skill	Communication
Social awareness	Empathy

Source: HBR.org

POST COVID WORKPLACE

Everything in our workplace has currently changed, but what keeps employees motivated and what employers and leaders can do remains the same, that is to appreciate, encourage and support. This is what the administration believed in and religiously followed.

The changes we have incorporated currently in the way our hospital functions will have to be incorporated in future as well. Sanitization and disinfection management will have to be strictly managed and supervised. New workflows, strategies and SOPS which have been devised may need to be followed for all patients.

Decision making is an integral and indispensable part of life. Every day, one has to make decisions of some type or the other. The decision process is somewhat easier when there is a single criterion or objective in mind. Various multi objective optimization problems are useful mathematical models for the investigation of real-world problems. Multi-objective optimization is an area of multiple criteria decisions making concerned with mathematical optimization problems [9]. On similar lines in the post-COVID era our decisions will have to consider multifaceted aspects like regaining economy, rehabilitation, provision of care to those who had postponed it during the crisis and adjusting to the new normal.

DIGITAL HEALTH

The COVID era has made us realize the importance of digital health. Tele technology is attaining a lot of importance during these difficult times. Use of remote learning, tele-medicine consultations, artificial intelligence and deep learning techniques will have to be encouraged and taught to the newer generation.

CONCLUSION

The COVID pandemic has brought focus on one distinguished human quality, 'teamwork'. All the HCWs volunteered to give their best, enthusiastically contributed in all ways possible and took, not one but many steps towards a common goal that is to heal and protect. A hospital administrator/managers job is to, ensure their safety, motivate them, and protect them, so that they can do theirs with all the sincerity and dedication. Values like integrity, courage, empathy, and a sense of purpose are the foundations of humanity and it is with these values that our Corona warriors have fought this war.

Leaders have a great responsibility on their shoulders. Appreciation and encouragement are what drives the human psyche. Tremendous efforts have been put by all personnel working towards a common goal and these efforts need to be appreciated.

Patience, calm minds, new administrative ideas and strategies, individual and cumulative discipline, a sense of solidarity and a shared sense of purpose are all that we need currently to overcome these unprecedented and challenging circumstances.

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