



## EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the attainment of universal health coverage and sustainable development goals**

COVID-19 pandemisinin evrensel sağlık sigortası ve sürdürülebilir kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşılmasına etkisi

Saurabh Shrivastava<sup>1</sup>, Prateek Shrivastava<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV) – Deemed to be University, India

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To the Editor,

The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has accounted for a significant loss of human lives, disruptions in the daily livelihood activities and there is a definite threat that it will compromise all sorts of progress made in the various dimensions of health care<sup>1</sup>. As a matter of fact, across the 216 affected nations and territories, a total of 4425485 cases and 302059 deaths have been reported, which amounts to a global case fatality rate of 6.8%<sup>2</sup>. The ongoing pandemic has given due emphasis that all the nations have to invest in strengthening of the health care delivery systems and primary health care to ensure the best defense against such outbreaks and thus mount a more coordinated and effective emergency response<sup>1,3</sup>.

In-fact, it won't be wrong to put on record that the COVID-19 pandemic will significantly affect the progress made till date and further delay the accomplishment of targets<sup>1</sup>. This dimension of the disease cannot be ignored, especially considering that the immunization coverage against vaccine-preventable diseases has remained the same in the last few years, while the challenge of non-communicable diseases is also increasing with each day<sup>4</sup>. Owing to the current outbreak of novel viral infection, the delivery of most of the essential health care services has been interrupted and the risk of emergence of outbreaks of other vaccine-preventable diseases are quite imminent, especially in low resource settings<sup>4,5</sup>.

We cannot ignore the fact that due to the unprecedented demands posed by the COVID-19, the authorities were compelled to allocate the available resources, including the human workforce. Nevertheless, it is extremely important that all efforts should be taken to restart the delivery of essential health care, depending upon the level of transmission and the preparedness of the health sector to respond to the outbreak<sup>1,3</sup>. At the same time, we have to bridge the gap arising due to inequality in access to health care, and here arises the need for the policy makers to ensure that all forms of user fees can be discontinued based on the local contexts<sup>3,4</sup>.

This approach has an added advantage that it will motivate members of the community to improve their health seeking behavior and approach health facilities, if they develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 and not give an opportunity for the disease to get transmitted<sup>4</sup>. Amidst the global vision to attain universal health coverage, it is essential that we are well prepared to respond to the health emergencies and improve access to health care and welfare services through multi-sectoral involvement<sup>3,4</sup>. In addition, we have to strengthen the health information system, including surveillance to promote the detection of all the cases and provide adequate evidence to policy makers to take evidence-based decisions appropriate to the local contexts<sup>5</sup>.

The findings of a recently released report by the World Health Organization indicated that over the

Yazışma Adresi/Address for Correspondence: Dr. Saurabh Shrivastava, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV) – Deemed to be University, India E-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com  
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years, the life expectancy of the people has increased, more so in low-income nations, wherein an increase of 11 years has been reported between the period 2000 and 2016<sup>4</sup>. The epidemiological analysis reflects that the predominant reason for improved life expectancy has been because of the improved assess o services to prevent multiple infectious diseases, neglected tropical diseases and quality assured delivery of maternal and child health care services across heterogeneous settings<sup>4,6</sup>. However, the reported increase in life expectancy has been unequal and even the rate of progress has not been quite slow and it appears difficult that we will be able to meet the set targets specified under the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1,4,6</sup>.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced the plan of the public health authorities to attain universal health coverage. The need of the hour is to strengthen the primary health care and health system to ensure that we continue to move forward in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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