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Short Commentary

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COVID-19 Pandemic Stress and Management Techniques

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No one saw this coming. No one was prepared for this. Corona virus disease 2019 has taken us by surprise. COVID-19 is the disease caused by the novel corona virus. It belongs to the RNA class of viruses and causes upper respiratory infection. It originated from Wuhan China in December 2019. It is currently a pandemic; it has cases in almost every corner of the world. It has led to a significant number of deaths and number of cases continues to rise by the day. Currently there is no cure and only preventive measures have been put in place to contain it. COVID-19 has affected every aspect of life. The psychological impact is immense. It has led to stress which is a normal physiologic response to an abnormal situation. Anxiety, fear and confusion levels have increased due to COVID-19 pandemic stress. The disease is new, its outcomes are unknown and high mortality rates have generated fear among the general public. It has led to change in sleeping patterns, paranoia about getting the disease, burden on healthcare workers and post-traumatic stress on patients coming from quarantine. Various organizations have recognized role of stress and have made recommendations on techniques to cope up with stress. These have been tailored to healthcare workers, general public and even parents.

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the disease caused by the new virus named Novel Corona Virus (2019-nCoV). Corona is a Latin word meaning crown; the outer envelope proteins resemble a crown. It belongs to the class of RNA virus and causes upper respiratory tract infection. It originated from Wuhan City in Huabei Province of China in December 2019. The city reported 40 unusual cases of pneumonia whose cause was unknown. Etiology was later established as Novel Corona Virus by the World Health Organization. There was a rapid spread of the disease across the world which led to declaration as Public Health Emergency of International concern on January 30, 2020 [1]. The number of cases continues to rise as well as mortality rate across the globe. The disease is marked by varying symptoms like fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, headache and loss of smell and taste. Symptoms take 2-14 days to manifest. Currently there is no cure of COVID-19 and management involves supportive care and oxygen use [2]. However, prevention to limit spread of the disease has been adopted. These include cleaning hands using soap and water or sanitize with 70% alcohol, limit close contacts (social distancing), use of face masks, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and covering coughs and sneezes (CDC,2020) [3].

Stress is any state of negative emotion that occurs in response to situations that are demanding or that go beyond one's resources of coping (Sandra et al, 2016). Stress is produced by stressors and is marked by physical changes like headache, sleeps problems, reduced appetite, fatigue and reduced immune. Psychologically, it causes worries, tension, sadness, anger. Behaviorally it causes difficulty in concentrating, increased use of alcohol and difficulty in making decisions. COVID-19 novelty, spread and mortality rates has caused confusion, fear and anxiety to the general public. People are reacting differently to this pandemic stress. Study to assess knowledge, attitude, anxiety and mental health in India population established high anxiety levels, with 80% of the people preoccupied with thoughts of COVID-19. The study also established 12.5% sleep difficulties, 37.8% paranoia about getting COVID-19 and 36.4 % stress related to reports by social media. The study recommended intensifying awareness to help boost mental health [1]. Healthcare workers are at the frontline in managing the disease. They are in direct contact with COVID-19 patients and are at risk of infection. Moreover, they have inadequate personal protective equipment, are in isolation with patients and less contact with their families which has generated fear, anxiety post-traumatic stress and discrimination. Seeking psychological counseling has been recommended to them to help cope

up [4]. Other reported fears are by the elderly and those with underlying chronic health problems that appear to be severely affected by the disease (CDC, 2020).

Coping with stress involves various techniques: emotion-focused technique that involves escape or avoidance, problem-focused technique that involves changing the stressful situation and cultural influence that emphasizes emotion techniques unique to cultures [5]. Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended ways to cope up the COVID-19 pandemic. It has recommended taking breaks from news and social media because hearing about the disease over and over can cause anxiety. One is advised to meditate, exercise, avoid alcohol or drugs and eat healthy to maintain good health. Knowing the facts of the disease can reduce anxiety. One is advised to maintain communication with their friends and families to reduce fear. People with underlying conditions and mental conditions are advised to maintain treatment and watch for worsening symptoms. Parents are advised to be assuring to their children and be watchful for changes in behavior like irritability, excess anxiety, worry, sadness. They are asked to talk to their children, share information be role models by showing exercise and good sleep patterns. For healthcare workers they need to do self-monitoring, check regularly with their colleagues, recognize impact of traumatic stress, watch out for physical symptoms like fatigue, allocate time to spend with their families, take break from media and ask for help if overwhelmed.

COVID-19 pandemic has huge psychological impact. Psychological stress has been identified and recognized as major issue of concern among the general public and healthcare workers. COVID-19 is unpredictable, it causes death, and this has caused fear, anxiety and confusion. People have responded differently to this pandemic. Recommendations have been made to help with coping up with this pandemic. Knowing the facts of the disease, taking breaks on media coverage, exercise and mediation are some of the recommended ways to cope with stress. COVID-19 has no cure currently, but I hope this situation will not be permanent. There will be light at the end of the tunnel.

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