

A Statement of Solidarity on COVID-19 Pandemic 2020 by the South Asian Family Physicians

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ABSTRACT

The World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) is a not-for-profit organization and was founded in 1972 by member organizations in 18 countries. WONCA now has 118 Member Organizations in 131 countries and territories with a membership of about 500,000 family doctors and more than 90 percent of the world's population. WONCA has seven regions, each of which has its own regional Council and run their own regional activities including conferences. WONCA South Asia Region is constituted by the national academies and colleges and academic member organizations of this region namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. In the background of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, the office bearers, academic

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leaders, practitioners, and researchers of primary care from the South Asia Region have issued a solidarity statement articulating the role of primary care physicians.

Keywords: COVID 19, COVID in South Asia, COVID in India, Lockdown, Primary Care, World Organization of Family Doctors, WONCA

Consensus Statement By:

WONCA SAR - World Organization of Family Doctors
South Asia Region
The Spice Route - WONCA Young Doctors Movement of
South Asia
WONCA Rural South Asia Region (WoRSA)
South Asia Primary Care Research Network (SAPCRN)
Academy of Family Physicians of India (AFPI)
Bangladesh Academy of Family Physicians (BAFP)
Bangladesh College of General Practitioners (BCGP)
College of Family Medicine Pakistan (CFMP)
College of General Practitioners of Sri Lanka (CGPSL)
Federation of Family Physicians Associations of India (FFPAI)
General Practitioners Associations of Nepal (GPAN)
General Practitioners in Bhutan
General Practitioners in the Maldives
Indian Medical Association College of General
Practitioners (IMACGP)
Pakistan Society for Family Physicians (PSFP)
MRCGP (INT) South Asia Board
Primary Care and Rural Health Bangladesh

Background: COVID-19 pandemic 2020 in South Asia

The COVID-19 pandemic presents one of the most unprecedented challenges to the health and wellness of the people of South Asia. After having a devastating impact on the population health of many countries, the threat is now looming over the countries of the most populous region of the world. The impact is likely to be short term as well as long term; both on health as well as the economy. South Asian countries share many healthcare problems that are unique, including maternal and child health issues; the double burden of infectious diseases as well as noncommunicable diseases. Also, there is a need to reach of the weaker section of the society, the one who is marginalized, vulnerable and underserved, during the pandemic. Having a population predominantly of rural habitation, special provisions are required to protect the rural population from the adverse outcomes of the pandemic in South Asia. Healthcare professionals as precious resources not only for South Asian countries but for the whole world. When the health systems of the most developed countries are struggling, we recognize that all sections of society and the healthcare professionals, within our respective countries, need to come together to be able to pool resources and ensure optimal care during the most testing circumstances.

Health System Response and the Role of Primary Care Physicians

Primary healthcare and teams including family doctors, medical officers, nurses, and other healthcare providers are essential foundations of any emergency community response and risk management. Family doctors as primary care physicians are the front line health workers who provide services to persons from all age groups, organ systems, and genders. They also provide the most cost-effective medical care within the community. Within the government systems, medical officers play the role of primary care physicians. Family physicians often see undifferentiated symptoms such as fever and flu and are more likely to encounter COVID-19 cases as well. They are proficient in managing infectious diseases in the community in the south Asian context. Therefore the family physician's role is pivotal along with other healthcare professionals towards addressing the community aspect of the pandemic. However, considering the novelty of COVID-19, we emphasize that it is necessary that all family physicians and the primary care providers have access to unhindered updated academic resources, equipped with appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE), upgraded with digital technologies, and be given a safe working environment. We also recognize that the health systems should be receptive to the needs of healthcare providers and protect them adequately while they can perform their duties in front lines of the pandemic situations. In this regard, the need for personal protection equipment (PPEs) for the primary care providers is equally important to anyone else working in a similar situation irrespective of the setting of care provision. Family physicians should be provided with PPE through the government schemes in the South Asian countries or be made available at discounted rates.

Primary Care Physicians: Specific Roles and Responsibilities

In a pandemic situation, the roles and responsibilities of family physicians as primary care physicians are manifold. The specific roles in mitigating the pandemic include triage, fever screening, handling the helplines, providing telemedicine consultations, training the paramedics, educating the community, facilitating community participation, guiding the local community leader and assisting the public health authorities. Their contribution is also important in the context of the provision of care for non-COVID-19 morbidity. Family physician's unique training and experience enable them to take care of ninety percent of the community-based morbidity. They can also provide primary care for mental health issues. Thus as front line primary care

providers, they can help in mitigating the pandemic and prevent unnecessary burden presenting at the hospitals.

We Stand Together in Solidarity!

In the moment of a great public health crisis, something which impacts all human beings on the earth, we the family

physicians of South Asia are together in solidarity with all our professional colleagues and people. We salute all healthcare workers who have stood to this call of duty. There is no greater service than the service of humanity. May we all triumph together for ourselves, our families, our people, our countries and our world.