

Concerning the COVID-19 Pandemic Catastrophe as a Result of Neglecting Primary Prevention

Dear Editor,

The new coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19), which was named by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses as a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2),^[1] has spread rapidly around the world, and on October 11, 2021, it caused more than 237,383,711 of confirmed cases, over 4,842,716 deaths; this is the largest known pandemic that the world has ever experienced.^[2] The disease is rampant around the globe, however, the number of cases and deaths in the developed regions, such as Europe and North America, is excessive, and this raises questions.^[2]

What was theoretically expected was that the developed economies, that refrained from being challenged by infectious diseases for years with their current core activities mostly focused on noninfectious diseases should have witnessed lower levels of the COVID-19 spread, since they already have cultivated primary prevention! However, despite the exorbitant costs incurred by these countries in combating the noninfectious diseases as part of the secondary prevention, e.g., expenditure on diagnostic and treatment systems, their health systems have been unable to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and have been virtually ineffectual.

The world's health systems have envisaged three general levels of prevention to combat illnesses and prevent the spread of diseases in communities. The primary prevention is to avoid the occurrence of diseases through activities such as vaccination, and provision of guidelines on hygiene; the secondary prevention is to prevent the spread of diseases, mortalities, and complications through methods such as early screening, diagnosis, and treatment; and the tertiary prevention to stop potential complications in patients and to improve rehabilitation.^[3]

Each level of prevention facilitates another level. In other words, if the primary prevention is enhanced, the chances of developing diseases are reduced, and therefore, the need for diagnosis and treatment will decrease. However, if the primary prevention is neglected, there will be a significantly higher number of patients who will require screening, diagnosing, and treating.

Now, the question is that how in the developed countries, where there have been reduced trends of infectious diseases to very low levels as the result of investments in the health systems and reinforcement of primary prevention, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused so many cases of infections and deaths?

The answer to this question is that the developed nations have heavily invested on secondary prevention, e.g., spending billions of dollars annually on providing hospitals with advanced equipment, while primary prevention has been neglected.

Therefore, the authors would like to emphasize that each of the levels of prevention reinforces the other levels, and none of these levels should be neglected. In the year 2020, and with all the advancements in science and medical equipment, washing hands, and disinfecting surfaces, and in the absence of a suitable vaccine and treatments for patients with COVID-19, remind the international community of the importance of primary prevention.

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Conflicts of interest

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