

Public interest should be given priority over economic calculation

"Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce (business) without morality (ethics), science without humanity, religion without sacrifice and politics without principle are roots of violence". – Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

Dear Editor,

Kaushal *et al.*^[1] made a Commentary on their experience of setting a Control room for Covid-19 at national center for disease control (NCDC), New Delhi, in the March 2021 issue of the Journal. They established a control room in January 2020, arranged logistics and now share their valuable experience as well as challenges confronted while coordinating with various stakeholders in the process of timely dissemination of information.

Under a heading of *Limitations*, they write that to provide this service of a dedicated helpline and toll-free number, the communications lines were laid through the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) system. Here, we need to recall that this is a public sector enterprise and is presently going through extreme stress and huge losses—to the extent that to compensate for the losses, it is taking extreme cost-cutting measures.^[2] Although its employees are in no way responsible for the current financial upheaval, the management and its decisions are accountable for the same. Presently, the employees are facing uncertainty and difficulty.^[3] It is pleasantly amazing and wondrous to learn that despite their odd circumstances, they are serving the nation at this critical juncture.

All of us are indebted to them for the selfless service of putting public interest over their own. Therefore, when the pandemic is over, we need to come together again in the boardroom and discuss the best way possible to repay this debt. If we fail to do so, when some next pandemic strikes perhaps nobody will be there to save us and the profit-making private sector will shirk away its responsibility at the drop of a hat. An idiom is that every difficulty teaches us a lesson and we need to learn this one; even if to do so has forced us to pay a heavy price.

At the beginning of the Commentary under the heading of *Background*, the authors write that maintaining social distance at all times and especially from people who are unwell and showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, and breathlessness

needs to be practised. However, we need to recall that since July 2020; various studies are emerging to prove that the severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) can be airborne, and due to that property, can infect someone located *beyond* the suggested physical distance.^[4] Therefore, we need to send a message that gathering in enclosed spaces needs to be avoided and our guard of mask cannot be lowered when being there beyond the apparent safe distance due to the heightened risk of aerosol transmission.

Also, since early May 2020, speculations were being raised about asymptomatic and presymptomatic transmissions of SARS-CoV-2,^[5] which proved to be correct later on. Various modelling studies were made and they estimate that about 40% of the transmission of the virus occurs by asymptomatic people. Hence, *everybody* needs to practise COVID-appropriate behaviour—not just symptomatic ones.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

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We accessed all the web pages while submitting the letter to the Editor.

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