# A tribute to frontline corona warriors—Doctors who sacrificed their life while saving patients during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

The 2019–2020 coronavirus pandemic is upending life on a global level as we know it. The highly infectious coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first seen in Wuhan, Hubei, China where its outbreak was first identified in December 2019. After almost 3 months, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization recognized it as a pandemic considering its significant ongoing spread in multiple countries across the world.

As of April 11, 2020, approximately 1,741,621 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in over 210 countries and territories resulting in around 106,670 deaths. Clearly, the corona virus outbreak situation cannot be taken lightly. Global pandemic of COVID 19, its ophthalmic implications, and precautions are nicely summarized in recently published editorial.[1]

While on one hand people across India and around the globe are largely confined to their homes with businesses and educational institutions all shut down in an attempt to contain the virus, and on the other hand doctors, health-care workers, and medical staff members are leading the battle against COVID-19 from the front. Putting their own lives at risk with selfless determination for the sake of saving lives, they truly are our heroes in these challenging times. While they are putting their own health, families, and most importantly their own lives at risk, the least we can do is appreciate their efforts and cooperate by staying safe indoors. That being said, it is good to see tributes pouring in for all the medical heroes working in scrubs. *On occasion of the Doctors' Day (March 30, 2020 USA and Australia), the stories of the medical heroes are inspiring and heartbreaking at the same time.*

## Doctors, Health-care Workers and Fight against COVID-19

Needless to say, doctors, nurses and people working in health-care sectors are particularly vulnerable to the highly infectious disease. In response to the global pandemic, the under-resourced doctors are facing unprecedented challenges. *The list of the sleep-deprived heroes includes doctors, nurses, medical cleaners, pathologists, paramedics, ambulance drivers, and health-care administrators. In the fight against coronavirus, the brave medical army stands strong with thermometers, stethoscopes, and ventilators as their weapons. Not to forget, medical researchers are working day in and night out against all odds, hoping to find the antidote to the disease.*

Since the coronavirus outbreak, health-care professionals have not only experienced the gratification of healing patients and saving their lives but have also lost many battles along the way. On top of that, many doctors have even sacrificed their own lives in the line of duty.

Every day, the selfless warriors are giving it their all in health-care settings while cutting themselves off from their families and loved ones. The sacrifice that they are making for the safety and welfare of humanity is priceless and deserves lifelong gratitude on our end. Most importantly, we must reassess the value health-care workers hold in our lives and the kind of treatment they get from us. Among the several lessons this coronavirus pandemic has been teaching us, the biggest one is to find ways to sufficiently invest in the better and more efficient medical fraternity and give medical professionals the respect, compensation and infrastructure that they truly deserve once this crisis is over. Moreover, the world needs to work towards advancement in medical research and technology. Nothing will be a greater tribute to the health-care workers than this.

That being said, we'd now like to highlight the heroic efforts of some courageous and inspiring doctors from across the globe who lost their lives while saving the lives of COVID-19 patients.

## Dr. Li Wenliang, an Ophthalmologist from China

The death that broke several hearts in the initial days of coronavirus spread was of Dr. Li Wenliang, a Chinese ophthalmologist who tried to warn fellow practitioners about the potential outbreak of a virus [Fig. 1]. Unfortunately, he was accused of making false claims and misleading the public. Dr. Li's warning did not depend on sophisticated laboratory testing or expensive imaging studies, but on his own
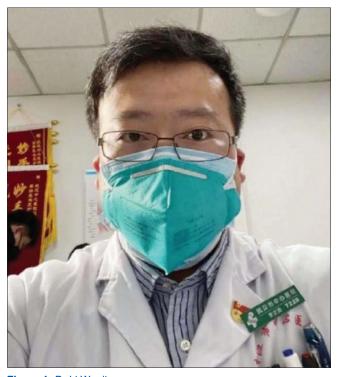


**Figure 1:** Dr Li Wenliang

understanding of biological plausibility—the kind of analysis that clinicians of all specialties could make.[2] *The New York Times* reported that on January 10, 2020, Dr Li developed a cough after having treated a woman for glaucoma who had unknowingly been infected with the coronavirus, probably by her daughter. No report suggests that he observed any ophthalmologic complications of the coronavirus infection in his patient.

The 34-year-old eye specialist, in his Weibo story, revealed how he had come down with cough and fever after a month of his warning going unnoticed.

The doctor had contracted the virus while treating a glaucoma case (suffering from corona virus) in Wuhan. Dr. Li passed away on February 7, 2020 leaving the people in China and worldwide grieving and angry.

Another doctor who died of the disease in Wuhan was just 29 years old. As per the reports, he had postponed his Lunar New Year marriage to serve humanity and treat patients who had been hit by the virus. Unfortunately, he ended up contracting the virus from one of his patients and died a hero.

## Dr. Roberto Stella from Italy

The COVID-19 wrath is taking no stop in Italy and the situation seems to be getting out of hands in the new epicenter of the disease. More than 66 doctors who were tested positive for coronavirus in Italy have reportedly died. According to the head of an Italian research institute, a total of 8,358 health workers have caught the disease.

Dr. Roberto Stella, aged 67, was an Italian general practitioner, who died on March 10 at the Como Hospital, as confirmed by the town's mayor, Mario Landriscina [Fig. 2]. He died of respiratory failure due to coronavirus. Like other heroes, Dr. Stella had contracted the virus while actively taking care of patients and guiding them on proper care.

Another case that shattered millions of hearts across the world was of a nurse who has reportedly taken her own life after being tested positive out of the fear of spreading the disease to others.

A 67-year-old physician in Italy who, despite running out of his protective gear, continued to treat the patients ended up sacrificing his life. Furthermore, a 34-year-old doctor, Daniela Trezzi who had been working on the front line at a hospital in Lombardy died after catching the disease. Her death was confirmed by the National Federation of Nurses of Italy.



**Figure 2:** Dr Roberto Stella

## Dr. Jean-Jacques from France

Jean-Jacques Razafindranazy [Fig. 3] was the first French doctor who died while treating coronavirus patients. The 68-year-old accident and emergency department doctor was retired but the passion that he had for serving humanity was undying. Thus, he volunteered to help his colleagues save the lives of people, as the number of incoming patients continued to increase.

The retired doctor was working in an emergency ward at the Lille University Hospital where he caught the disease. His death was announced through a social media post titled "My Father: A Hero" written by his family.

## Dr. Usama Riaz from Pakistan

Dr. Usama Riaz [Fig. 4], a young 26-year-old, became the first Pakistani doctor to die of coronavirus. He remained on the forefront, screening people returning from abroad from the Pakistan–Iran border at a hospital in Gilgit-Baltistan. He was busy fighting the deadly virus with utmost bravery and confidence when he contracted the virus. Upon showing symptoms, he was rushed to the hospital and was put on a ventilator but he could not make it. He proved to be a real hero by sacrificing his life while saving the lives of many.

## Dr. Adil El Tayar from the UK

Sixty-three-year-old Dr. Adil El Tayar [Fig. 5] became the first frontline health-care worker to die of coronavirus in the UK on March 25. The organ transplant consultant was performing his duty at St. Mary's and St. George's hospitals in London when he contracted the virus. He started showing symptoms in mid-March due to which he immediately self-isolated himself. In a matter of 12 days, he went from a perfectly fit doctor treating patients to a COVID-19 victim lying in a hospital morgue.
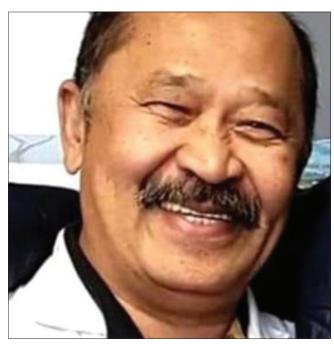


**Figure 3:** Dr. Jean-Jacques from France

## Dr. Shirin Rouhani from Iran

The Iranian doctor, Shirin Rouhani [Fig. 6], also lost her life while treating coronavirus patients. Her determination and will power was such that she continued to treat patients till her last breath even when she herself was on IV. She knew she could not rest because of the shortage of doctors and medical workers to cater to the needs of patients.

## Dr. Israel Bactol from the Philippines

The Philippine Heart Center announced the death of the first doctor, Dr. Israel Bactol [Fig. 7], who was a senior Adult Cardiology fellow-in-training. The medical professionals in the country are devastated and so are the citizens. While grieving the death, they have strengthened their resolve to make it the first and last death.

## Coronavirus Crisis Causing Chaos in the U.S.A.

As of April 11, 2020, a total of 20,043 people died due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in America, while approximately 521,084 cases have been registered in the national healthcare system.

Doctors face the contagious disease daily, as they work around the clock to keep the situation under control. However, with the rising cases, it was inevitable for someone within the medical field to contract the viral infection.

The American College of Emergency recently reported two emergency room doctors have come down with the virus in the past week. Out of which, a senior emergency physician doctor Frank Gabin passed away a few days back. The good doctors contracted the disease after wearing the same surgical mask for a week. The inadequate supply of



**Figure 5:** Dr. Adil El Tayar from the UK



**Figure 4:** Dr. Usama Riaz



**Figure 6:** Dr. Shirin Rouhani from Iran



**Figure 7:** Dr. Israel Bactol from the Philippines

personal protection equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers is the primary reason for this tragedy. The other physician is a 40-year-old Washington-based practitioner. Both doctors are under observation, as their colleagues try to prevent their condition from escalating.

## Coronavirus Update from India

The coronavirus crisis in India is also steadily engulfing the nation. So far, there have been 8,339 cases of the coronavirus reported in India and 249 deaths. The current statistics include 774 recovered cases (as of 11th April 2020). Moreover, over 50 healthcare professionals have been tested positive for corona virus in India. The first three doctors that were tested had no prior travel history or symptoms. It is believed that all the doctors contracted the disease through their patients. An Andheri-based doctor is currently under quarantine with his family as all members have tested positive for the disease.

Furthermore, the first medical practitioner to die was Dr. Shatrughan Panjwani, a private practitioner from Indore. The 60-year-old physician passed away on 9th April, 2020 leaving behind many mourners.

## Final Words

While the deadly virus has brought attention to the inadequacies in the health-care systems across the globe, doctors and health-care workers have been risking their lives to save all of us. They are also risking the lives of their family members, which indeed is a huge sacrifice. On top of that, the shortage of face masks, shields, and protective gear is not helping. And this makes the efforts of the medical workers even more extraordinary. On occasion of the Doctors' Day (March 30, 2020 USA and Australia), the stories of the medical heroes putting themselves on the forefront to fight the virus are inspiring and heartbreaking at the same time. They deserve all the appreciation and support. *The sacrifice of doctors and healthcare workers across the globe will not go to waste. Humanity will always be grateful to them for what they are doing during these unprecedented times. The respect for healthcare professionals has grown manifolds in the hearts of people. It is good to see that the Government of India along with the governments worldwide have decided to allocate more budget for healthcare in their* *respective countries.* The world is taking the health, healthcare professionals and hospitals more seriously, as it appears. More work is expected to be done for hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs) to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure in India as well as in countries across the world.

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