

Correspondence

'And with your spirit': a holistic support for healthcare workers in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRACT

Public health is characterized by social justice where it has the obligation to 'give what is due' and address the needs of the entire community. Recent correspondence calls for the physical, financial and mental support of the government to our 'distressed' healthcare workers. However, this seems to insufficient since the spiritual well-being is set aside and Filipinos are known to be religious people by their very nature. I therefore propose and highlight the use of a holistic approach which emphasizes the needed support which caters the faith dimension of our frontliners. The proposals include the availability of human resource and religious practices in both public and private hospitals where the healthcare workers do their battle relentlessly.

Keywords social justice, spiritual, holistic, human resource, religious practices

To the Editor

'Giving what is due' is basically described as the virtue of justice. Public health is better understood as a social justice endeavor where it has the ability and the obligation to address disadvantage, by improving capacities and avoiding further inequities, in order to achieve and maintain gains in the health of the entire community.¹ In a recent correspondence published in this journal, the author emphasizes that healthcare workers need to be prioritized in terms of physical, mental and financial support from the government so that their needs will be sufficed, thus, they will be working at maximum to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).² In the Philippines, the tremendous negative effect of the pandemic to healthcare workers is evident. The 'distressed' workers are pouring out their sentiments by claiming that the country's health care system is 'overwhelmed', citing a deficiency in the sector's workforce, failures in case finding, isolation, contact tracing and quarantine measures, the need to ensure transportation and workplace safety before easing lockdown measures, and the public's compliance with self-protection measures.³ In fact, the latest data as of 16 January 2021 show that there are already 14 041 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among healthcare workers and 77 deaths.⁴ These data indeed justify the author's plea of physical, financial and mental support from the government for these frontliners.

However, I argue that a selective support for the mentioned human aspects is insufficient. There should be a holistic approach that will ensure an integral support which can be achieved by also catering to their spiritual well-being. It should

be noted that the human person is an 'embodied spirit' which reiterates the union between the material (body) and spiritual (soul). Aristotle asserts that it is the soul that animates the body.⁵ Filipinos are known to be religious people since Christianity greatly influenced the country since 1521. The faith and religiosity of the Filipinos have already withstood the tests of time that even the pandemic cannot prevent them from practicing it. This has always been outwardly manifested in their devotion to various saints and participation in religious festivals. Filipino healthcare workers always cling to their faith most especially in difficult times. This is the reason why the spiritual aspect must never be set aside because it is the faith that revitalizes the weak body and helps to heal any emotional pain. Concretely, I suggest that public and private hospitals must ensure the availability of a prayer venue or chapel for the regular visit of health workers in any time of the day. This keeps them in touch with God to start their work for a request of protection. Holy Mass or any kind of worship service must be held regularly at the hospital, thus, requiring the presence of priest or pastor. In relation to this, the minister can do counseling, spiritual direction or even initiate an informal conversation with them just to check how was their day. Lastly, meditation or reflection is an essential practice to refuel one's 'spiritual dryness' and this can be taught or facilitated by the minister during recollections or retreats. These interventions which focus on the spiritual well-being of the healthcare worker complete the support needed for a maximum performance. It is not an impossibility since it is rooted to the very nature of every Filipino.

References

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