

all associated with this field must ensure that they safeguard the interests and livelihood of all ophthalmologists during the pandemic.

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## Commentary: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on income and opportunities of ophthalmologists in India. Ophthalmologists' Workplace Expectations and Satisfaction Survey (OWESS) Report 1

The ongoing COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic has taken its toll on all health workers to a greater or lesser extent. Everyone from junior resident to the head of the institute has had to face the onslaught.

Among the many aspects, medical training has taken a serious hit because of the pandemic.<sup>[1]</sup> Of all medical specialties, patients seeking ophthalmic care were the fewest during the pandemic.<sup>[2]</sup> The lockdown caused increased levels of anxiety and stress to ophthalmologists.<sup>[1]</sup> We, ophthalmologists, are at heightened risk of infection due to exposure to viral particles during routine face-to-face ophthalmic clinical examination by slit lamp or direct/indirect ophthalmoscope because of the close proximity to patients.<sup>[3]</sup> Breazzano *et al.*<sup>[4]</sup> reported that ophthalmology was among the specialties with the highest

proportion of residents with confirmed COVID-19 across all residency programs in New York.

The various factors contributing to the differential effect of the pandemic on ophthalmologists such as age, gender, sector of work (government/private), stage of practice (beginner/senior), type of practice (individual/salaried), and so on have been elaborately studied in this article.

Since ages, it has been said that the young and women are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of a disaster. This study during the COVID-19 pandemic proved no exception. It was indeed the young ophthalmologists and women ophthalmologists who suffered the most.

The younger ophthalmologists got affected by the pay cuts, reduced patients, decreased surgical exposure, and training. Although surgery numbers during training matter, the quality of surgical training is equally important to decide how good a surgeon is. Wet-lab training, videos, simulator-based teaching, and other innovative methods can be put to maximum use till the actual surgical chances begin to increase.

Although the pandemic led to a smaller number of residents in the operation theater and fewer cases, on a positive note it gave the residents more time with their mentors to discuss the

subject in detail and helped them in better understanding the surgical nuances. The extra free time available could be utilized to boost theoretical knowledge and focus on the ongoing research work, as we hardly find enough time during our busy clinical responsibilities. A famous quote says, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." It has also shown us how important healthy lifestyle practices, creative art, hobbies, and family time are for our personal life and spiritual peace.

Considering the low income to hospitals, it seemed unavoidable at that time to reduce the salary of the employees, but as noted in the article, proportional extra remuneration when patient load picks up seems a reasonable approach. In fact, helping the employees during difficult times (even though with reduced remuneration) will earn their goodwill in the long run.

Teleconsultation has been a blessing for those fearing a hospital visit for an urgent medical need. Many reports from institutions have highlighted the significant downscaling of ophthalmologic patient footfalls and procedures as well as a shift toward telemedicine.<sup>[5,6]</sup> Many institutes around the world, including those in the Asia-Pacific regions, are actively implementing and refining their online platforms to run their clinical services during the pandemic.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition to providing patients with medical care, it can help hospitals in retaining their patients and keep the wheel in motion during difficult times. In future, it has the potential to hold up the hospital economy.

Khanna *et al.*<sup>[7]</sup> found that among the 2,355 ophthalmologists participating in the study, 32.6% had some degree of depression, and it was significantly higher in younger ophthalmologists and the odds decreased by 3% with every 1-year increase in age. As the virtual platform is on the rise, it seems advisable to have a portal that the ophthalmologists, especially the young ophthalmologists who are experiencing similar difficulties, can use to discuss and share their situations and get valuable advice from seniors/teachers besides professional advice whenever required.

As we all know by now, COVID-19 is here to stay, and we do not know how many waves we may have to face in the coming months. Adapting to the changing environment is inevitable. Every hospital and every doctor is learning from their experience, the best possible way of living *the new normal*.

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