



Letter to Editor

Covid-19 Future Challenges: Ease in Lockdown, Fragile Health Sector

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COVID-19 cases in Pakistan are increasing exponentially since last couple of days with over 50,000 infected individuals and over 1000 deaths [1]. Furthermore, government has eased the lock down as Pakistan is facing serious economic crisis. A 4% GDP loss is predicted in economy due to disruptions in business activities. Government has also announced a reduction in budget goals for financial year 2020 and 2021. This ease in lockdown is a desperate effort to support collapsing economy and reducing unemployment. Government statistics are predicting many deaths due to hunger if lockdown prolongs [2]. Unfortunately, despite of all efforts made by government and healthcare sector to generate awareness in public about social distancing, sanitization and disinfection in this lockdown ease people are not following any standard operational procedures (SOPs). People are making unnecessary trips to shopping malls, local markets and even to their relatives [3]. This unusual interaction is dragging Pakistan's health sector into a deep pit. Incubation period of COVID-19 is between 5-6 days generally which can be up to 15 days in rare case. Therefore, there are many pre-symptomatic carries out there in public spreading the infection [4]. Current data analysis reveals that number of confirm cases doubles after every 10days. This scenario could end up in millions of COVID-19 positive cases by the end of June 2020 (Figure 1).

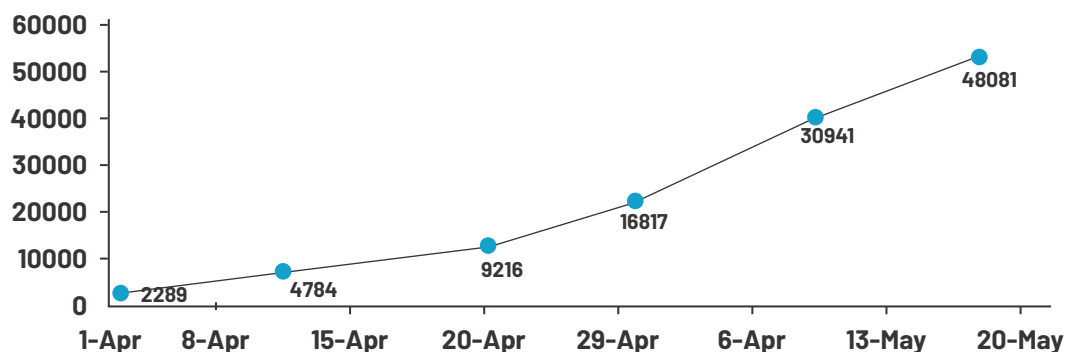


Figure 1: Exponential increase in confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Pakistan (from April to May 2020) Another alarming aspect is due to Eid-ul-Fiter holidays many people are travelling from urban areas to rural areas. According to current facts and figures COVID-19 has hit mainly big cities of Pakistan [1]. Moreover, people are ignoring SOPs mainly due to negative propaganda on social media by people either seeking publicity or trying to achieve some religious agenda. This ease in lockdown is a ticking bomb as partial impact in terms of increased number of cases is seen. Pakistan is a developing country with health budget of only 1403.2 billion rupees for year 2018-2019 against estimated need of 5932.5 billion rupees [5]. These figures clearly indicate that Pakistan's health sector cannot bear such a humongous number of patients. There are approximately 1280

hospitals and 187970 doctors in Pakistan which are already over-burdened to full fill medical needs of 212million people [6]. Neither our hospitals nor our government can cope with pandemic if cases will keep on increasing. Government and civil society should join hands in hand to minimize the effects of this calamity. More people from different religious sects should be encouraged to address people about gravity of situation. Public figures from science, politics and media should be involved to encounter negative propaganda which could cost many lives. People should be trained using electronic and print media about home quarantine and immediate reporting of infection. It is high time to far sight the coming dangers and equip ourselves to combat this pandemic in all possible means.

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