



# COVID-19: saving the saviours should be our priority – is India in the right direction?

## Abstract

This commentary draws attention to the need of taking care of the physical and mental health of the healthcare workers while treating patients with COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Healthcare Workers. Coronavirus. Personal Protective Equipment. Mental Health. Suicide.

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Healthcare workers, who are the current gods in the countries across the globe, have been struggling hard to not get exposed to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) while treating the patients. As the pandemic speeds up, access to the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits for healthcare workers becomes a basic concern.[1] To protect themselves, they require to wear a PPE, which includes a mask, an eye shield, shoe covers, a gown (with or without aprons), and a pair of gloves.[2]

During mid-February 2020, the Union Health Ministry officials announced that there are very few companies manufacturing PPEs and government is in talks with three companies and have got 20,000 PPE kits;[3] but, the government has projected the requirement of about 50,000 PPE kits for the medical staff treating COVID-19 patients.[4] Earlier, the facilities for treating COVID-19 patients were there in public hospitals only; but, now private hospitals have also enrolled in treating COVID-19 patients.[5] Therefore, the requirement for PPE kits has also been increased. Recently, two hospitals in Mumbai city have been affirmed as containment area as three doctors and at least 26 nurses were confirmed COVID-19 positive.[6,7] This was not the first time when any medical staff have tested positive; earlier around 50 medical staff members tested COVID-19 positive while treating patients, and some of them were not even engaged in the treatment of COVID-19 patients.[8] In Italy, nine per cent of the COVID-19 cases are healthcare workers,[9] which are 20% of total healthcare workers.[10] Hundreds of healthcare workers have died throughout the world.[11]

The physical health of healthcare workers is not the only concern, but their mental health as well. They are suffering from anxiety of nursing the patients without PPE kits and swiftly changing hospital rules. They are working for longer durations and living away from their families to protect them from the infection.[12] Many doctors and healthcare workers took to Twitter and other social networking portals to show their distress of not meeting their loved ones. To support medical staff, experts need to be constituted for protecting their mental health as well as physical health.[13] For meeting shortages, the defence public sector undertakings and some selected private companies are being tied up with for PPE kits' manufacturing at large scale.[1] While talking about the mental health, the Indian Medical Association has announced that they have appointed 16 psychiatrists and psychological counsellors to help healthcare professionals in combating stress.[14]

Healthcare workers are also human and experience the same anxiety and stress as we do. The PPE kits may be delivered shortly and the physical health of healthcare workers may be taken care of. But, the question remains the same on their mental health. Only 16 psychiatrists and a few psychological counsellors[14] for a nation with the second-largest population in the world will not be enough. A few healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients have also committed suicide in some countries due to mental ill-health caused by the situation. Some healthcare workers took to social media to talk about their mental health as well. India needs to take some proactive steps to keep our health-heroes as healthy as possible.

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