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**Title**

Reading the minds of doctors – a survey in Covid 19 crisis in India

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**Title**

Reading the minds of doctors – a survey in Covid 19 crisis in India

**Abstract**

**Introduction**

Poor work-life balance has become a part of life of a doctor. Throughout the journey of training and initial years of practice, a doctor hardly gets an opportunity to think outside medical practice. Lockdown and Covid 19 crisis has given some doctors time to think about philosophy and meaning of life. We surveyed 86 doctors with a questionnaire related to what is going on in their minds and life when they got time to think during Covid 19 crisis.

**Methods**

We surveyed specialist and super-specialist doctors with a questionnaire of 9 simple questions relevant to common issues in a doctors’ life, their thinking in relation to current scenario and their experience in the Covid – 19 crisis or in general using platform of surveymonkey.com and analysed them in a meaningful way.

**Results**

Total 86 doctors responded to the survey, 90.58% enjoyed stay at home, 68.67% enjoyed time with family, 67.06% thought that “me time” in lockdown has changed their perspectives to life and 71.76% thought of bringing change in their way of medical practice. A total of 70.92% of doctors were not happy with the administration and 46.51% thought that people are selfish. A total of 78.57% thought that there is a need to think about their own health and safety before helping patients.

**Summary**

Lockdown and vulnerability during crisis has given a doctor time to think differently. There is a need to have better work-life balance. Friction with administration and public has started affecting the way of their thinking.

**Key words**

Covid 19 crisis, Work-life balance, Doctor's life, Doctor - patient relationship

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**Main text**

**Introduction**

The common story in a doctor’s life is; less time at home, less time with family and stressful professional life. A long medical education does not give much time to think what a doctor exactly wants in life. A doctor spends his most productive years of life in getting education and training. Medical education does not teach much about philosophy of life unless you self learn. Once a doctor completes the education; he/she becomes busy in establishing his/her practice and next 10 to 15 years are spent relentlessly with poor work-life balance. Indirect indicators like lower life expectancy1, higher suicide rate2, and higher young cardiac mortality3 confirm the poor work-life balance in doctors’ life. Stress is considered a major reason for effect on the health3. Above and over, since recent past doctors have been facing lot of friction with public and administration. Covid 19 crisis has raised newer questions to add on this. The lockdown in Covid - 19 crisis might have given many doctors a “me time” to think or a time with family as during lockdown only emergency work was allowed and no elective work was done. We present a survey of 86 doctors with a questionnaire related to what is going on in their minds and life when they got time to think during Covid 19 crisis.

**Methods**

We formulated a questionnaire of 9 simple questions (Table 1) relevant to common issues in a doctors’ life, their thinking in relation to current scenario and their experience in the Covid – 19 crisis or in general. After each question we placed an optional option of comment, if they have any. We carried out the survey using platform of surveymonkey.com. We sent the link of the survey to doctors through WhatsApp and emails. Allopathic doctors in India who have done speciality post-graduation (MD, MS or DNB) or super-speciality (DM, Mch, DNB) in any field were included in the study. Their responses were anonymous to us. The survey was made live on 5th May 2020 and was closed on 9th May 2020. We collected the data of their responses and analysed in a meaningful way.

**Results**

Total 86 doctors were responded to the survey (Table 2).

Total 90.58% (77 out of 85 respondents) of doctors enjoyed the time at home in lockdown; out of them, 29.41% (25/85) were enjoying even after a month of lockdown, 45.88% (39/85) were enjoying but missing their practice and 15.29% (13/85) were started getting bored at home after a month of lockdown.

A total of 68.67% (57 out of 83 respondents) were enjoying family time at home; in the comment section of this question, apart from family time many doctors enjoyed their missing hobbies like exercise, cooking, gardening and music. Only 2.4% were interested in webinars.

A total of 67.06% (57 out of 85 respondents) has thought that the “me time” in lockdown has changed their perspectives of life. Seventeen doctors were commented in the comment section to this question. Majority of comments suggest that we should have more “me time”, we need to slow down in life, life needs to be simple and basic and we need more balance in life.

A total of 71.76% (61 out of 85 respondents) of doctors thought of bringing change in the way of their medical practice; 15.29% (13/85) want to give more family time, 12.94% (11/85) want to have more “me time”, 43.53% (37/85) want to have less stressful life, while 28.24% (24/85) would not like to change their way of practice.

A total of 70.92% (61 out of 86 respondents) were not happy with the administration and government; 31.39% (27/86) feel that the government does not care about doctors and 39.53% (34/86) feel that decisions of government are politically motivated, while 29.07% (27 out of 86 respondents) think that decisions of government are satisfactory looking at the current crisis situation. About public and patient behaviours towards doctor; 46.51% (40 out of 86 respondents) think that people are selfish and their behaviour towards doctors is not good, while 47.67 (41 out of 86 respondents) think that Covid crisis has temporarily improved the public perception towards doctors.

A total of 78.57% (66 out of 84 respondents) doctors think that they need to give importance to their own safety and health before helping the patients, while 21.43% (18 out of 84) believes that patients’ priority should come first.

Those doctors who own the hospital, majority wanted to pay either full or more than 50% salary to their staff during the Covid 19 crisis. About restarting the elective work, there was a mix response, 37.21% had already started some elective work while we were doing the survey, 25.58% wanted to start the elective work now onward, 10.47% wanted to wait till lockdown is over while 26.74% have taken a wait and watch approach for the elective work.

**Discussion**

A super-specialist spends around 15 years of his/her life in getting trained after schooling, which is longer than any other professional training. After completion of such a long training, there is a lot of pressure to settle down quickly and start earning. Throughout this journey, a doctor never gets an opportunity to think, discuss or learn about work-life balance. Poor work-life balance has become an inherent part of a life of a doctor. Lockdown in Covid – 19 crisis has given many doctors a time to think differently; probably first time in their entire career. Knowingly or unknowingly; a doctor spends very less time at home and with family. This fact is evident from the response, a total of 90.58% doctors enjoyed stay at home and 68.67% enjoyed the family time. Quality family relationship is an instrumental for the well being of a person4; strong family support is a stress buster. During the lockdown period, majority realised that they were missing family life. Majority in the comment section confessed that they enjoyed their hobbies during lockdown which were compromised in their routine life. Hobbies can relax and recharge the person5. It may even improve the professional engagement6 and reduce the burn out. Sir William Osler said7, “You will be a better man and not worse practitioner for an avocation”, an interesting statement to understand and may be more relevant now.

As the whole world is going through a crisis and everyone has realised that the life is vulnerable than they think, it has provided a unique opportunity to think about meaning of life. There is a perception that for many; focus is being shifted from more prosperous professional and financial life to have a better quality of life or better work-life balance, which is apparent in our survey. A total of 67.06% felt that the “me time” in lockdown has change their perspectives in life now, 71.76% want to bring change in their way of practice, either they want to spend more time with family, or want to have more “me time” or want to have less stressful life. This means that in routine life majority of us are so much engrossed in professional activities that we do not think enough for our own life, we do not get enough time8 for our own problems.

Recently there is a lot of turbulence in relationship between doctor and patient and doctor and administration in India. A total of 70.92% doctors are not happy with the administration; 31.39% feel that the government does not care about doctors and 39.53% think that decisions of government are politically motivated. There has been lot of chaos and confusions in practice during Covid 19 crisis; initially government asked to stop private clinics and then at places administrations forced to re-open the clinics. There are incidences of violence against doctors by public and politicians. Many of the decisions might have been taken to suit the political agendas rather showing concerns for the medical fraternity. Medical fraternity faced troubles from all around despite fighting bravely during this crisis. A total of 41.86% doctors believe that people are selfish while 47.67% believe that public behaviour has temporarily improved for doctors. One drastic change has been observed in this survey; from the days of training a doctor imbibes selfless attitude towards patients, majority of doctors compromise their own health and family time for patients. But in this survey, 78.57% of doctors thought that their own health should be the priority now, it would be interesting to see whether this is a need of an hour because we neglect our health1, 2, 3 or a subconscious response to the way people and government treating the doctors poorly in last few years. Indian medical association has suggested that 75% of doctors face some kind of violence at work9.

Although many corporate hospitals have reduced their payments to the hospital staff, majority of doctors who run their hospitals think that the staff should be paid either full or more than 50% of salary. Ideal timing of beginning of elective work is debatable, but at some point everyone has to re-start it. American college of surgeons advise not to postpone cancer work10, which seems reasonable taking due precautions and care. More than 50% of doctors have either started some elective work or about to start at the time of this survey.

**Summary**

Poor work-life balance has become a part and parcel of a doctor’s life. Lockdown and vulnerability during this crisis has given a doctor time to think differently. Majority of doctors want to spend time at home with family, they want to change their way of practice. Many want to make their practice less stressful. More than half of the doctors are dissatisfied with administration while nearly half of the doctors are unhappy with the public behaviour. This experience seems to have changed the perspectives of majority of doctors, and they think that their own health and safety is now a priority. It seems that there is an urgent need to settle the growing differences between doctors and patients and; doctors and administrations before it goes beyond the irreparable stage.

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**Table titles**

Table 1 – Survey questionnaire

Table 2 – Survey results