**Correspondence/ Commentary Article**

**Ethical Communication to Patient & Society: A Critical Responsibility in COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Saptarshi Chatterjee**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Microbiology**

**School of Life Science & Biotechnology, Adamas University**

**COVID-19 Task Force Member-Adamas University**

**Communication:** [**saptarshi.gcc09@gmail.com/**](mailto:saptarshi.gcc09@gmail.com/)[**saptarshi.chatterjee@adamasuniversity.ac.in**](mailto:saptarshi.chatterjee@adamasuniversity.ac.in)

**Mob: 7016636678**

**Abstract:** The outbreak of COVID19 has challenged the world in every possible way. Apart from the scientific challenge to come up with a remedy for the virus, it has also challenged the society in ethical aspect related to the communication of fact. Ethical communication is warranted from responsible sectors of clinicians and scientists to refute the unscientific rumors and better understanding of the disease to the larger society. Updating the correct status of medicine, awareness on fraudulent drugs, information regarding effectiveness of alternative medicine, responsible usage of social media, product endorsement and research must be governed by strict ethical sense, to overcome the situation of COVID 19. This critical responsibility during COVID 19 will have far-fetched impact on society.

**Keywords:** Ethical communication, COVID 19, Critical Responsibility, Society

**Background:** The emergence of COVID 19 since Dec 2019 and its subsequent pandemic status declared by World Health Organization (WHO) has created a global threat on public health and challenged the entire society (1,2). The challenge is further expressed for the scientific community including scientists, researchers and clinicians to find a suitable solution for this menace of COVID 19. The scientific and medicinal community has failed to provide medicine as well as vaccine as of now, yet there are several encouraging results that might contribute to the solution. In the present situation, responsible and ethical communication is expected from the scientific community towards patients as well as the society.

**Ethics in updating status of medicine:** Since there is no definite antiviral against the treatment of COVID 19, clinicians are mostly engaged in supportive therapy, reducing the severity of symptoms. Several medicines such as Hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir etc. have been attempted empirically, though none of them have received approval from USFDA. Remdesividr has received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) status from USFDA for emergency use of the drug for the treatment of suspect and laboratory confirmed COVID 19 case in adult and children hospitalized with severe disease (3) Therefore, it is the ethical responsibility of the clinician to update the patient with this information and obtain consent before usage.

**Awareness on fraudulent medication:** Unavailability of medicine for treating COVID 19 has led to the arrival of several drugs, formulations etc. in the name of medicine to COVID 19. Many of them have definite label as anti-COVID-19 and been manufactured and sold. USFDA has already published a list of such fraudulent medicines along with their manufacturer (4). Essential oils, herbal products, Liposomal vitamin C, cannabidiol, homeopathic drugs, colloidal silver nanoparticles etc. are a few of such products enlisted. Many of these are extrapolation of observation from *in vitro* lab-studies and skipped the clinical trial leading to ambitious and miss-leading statements. It now rests on the ethical responsibility of doctors and scientists to prevent the application of such medicine and not to instill a sense of false security.

**Alternative medicine:** Several form of alternative medicine like Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy (AYUSH) etc. are engaged in combating the situation along with modern medicine (5). However, it is to be emphasized that there is ‘no available remedy’ in alternative form of medicine to cure COVID-19. However, non-specific prophylactic approach in the form of immunomodulation and rejuvenating properties are available through AYUSH. Clinical tests are yet to confirm their role but believed to strengthen immunity and applicable in prevention and disease management.

**Ethics in comments on social media:** Social media has been a source of information during the period of lockdown involving ‘social distancing’. There are rumor and unscientific information shared in the name of scientists, scientific organizations etc. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Government of India (6), WHO (7) and other agencies are committed to refute such information and provide awareness to citizens. It is the responsibility of scientific and medical community to counter these with evident information. Several video-advise by clinicians are also found to be fraudulent / imperfect in terms of scientific knowledge (8). Disclosure and emphasis on inadequately proven fact is something that the clinicians should refrain from, especially on social media.

**Ethics in product endorsement:** The issue of medicinal product endorsement by clinicians have been a long-time ethical debate. However, several products including sanitizers, mask etc. are essentials to prevent the spread and occurrence of COVID 19. Clinicians are frontline warriors requiring personal protective equipment (PPE) and N95 mask to deal with infected as well as suspected patients. An ethical guideline on usage of such essential products and its rational use can help in the situation of demand and deal with inadequacy. Awareness on non-effective products (9) and proper advice (10) are coveted essential commitment form the scientific and medical fraternity.

**Over generalizing statements:** The society has seen comments from the non-domain experts regarding several issue including artificial creation of COVID 19 strain in China, summer months to eradicate the disease, low income countries to be immune to the disease etc. These are based on partial fact that do to comply to the proper understanding of the disease and situation. The counter facts are proved by scientists but seldom reach the society viz. natural origin of COVID-19 strain (11) or misconception of low income countries in being immune to COVID 19 (12). Ethically, it is important to refrain from such comments the can create a havoc impression in the society especially if spoken by influential and educated community.

**Research & Publication:** Since the occurrence of COVID-19, there has been stiff increase in research articles published in relation to the virus, disease and situation. Several of them are redundant, insignificant and report initial studies, that could not be relied upon. It is the ethical responsibility to publish significant research output and confirmed information to prevent creation of junk information and provide scientific evidence related to COVID-19 to the society (13).

**Conclusion:** The challenge of COVID-19 has given a significant scope of introspection in ethical context especially in terms of providing information to patient and society, at large, to cope up to the situation. An urgent response from the scientific and medicinal community in this context can help to overcome the situation.

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