

The Baggage

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I was breathing heavily under three tightly fitted masks. Although I had applied an ample amount of sanitizer and worn sufficient layers of gloves, I felt vulnerable. Somewhere under the PPE, yours truly was drenched by a tsunami of emotions. Empathy, hope, concern, and anxiety. This was the baggage I carried with me as I stepped inside the Intensive Care Unit of Covid-19.

My myopic eyes trapped under the constricting goggles spotted men and women of all age groups, surrounded by staff and machines with a single goal of helping them breathe. Despite their ethnic, social, and financial differences, they all had one thing in common. Even though they were crowded with people, they were all very lonely.

“When can I go home?” was the unanimous question asked by each one of them. A question I had no clear answer to. As their lungs got weaker, their mental health, too, lost its strength with each passing day.

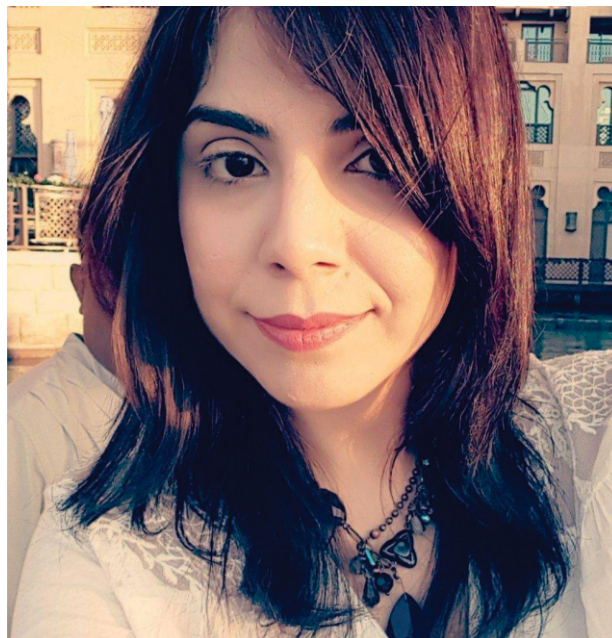
“I want to have a meal with my family.” said an elderly man with wrinkled skin and grey hair, depicting decades of experience. Even though they called him frequently on his phone, he missed their touch.

“I held my grandson by his hand and taught him how to walk,” he added with a nervous smile. “I want to see him run.” His eyes were filled with a strange mixture of hope and uncertainty.

“I haven’t slept in 2 days.” Said another 60-year-old female with tired eyes, when asked how she was doing. She had seen several patients being put on ventilators and several others dying. Two days earlier, a middle-aged lady next to her bed breathed her last. The vacant bed haunted her.

“I am scared I might not wake up.” A tear rolled down her cheek. I could sense the hopelessness in her trembling voice.

Each patient lived a different story but bore the same psychological burden. It was not just their bodies that were attacked by this disease, but their minds as well. They were juggling between a struggle to breathe and a fear of dying alone. A trap no one would not wish



upon anyone. Apart from oxygen, medicines, and big machines, they needed a hand to hold, an ear to listen, and a shoulder to cry on to help them cope. And this is an important aspect of this infection that we must not forget.

As a physician, I have encountered several challenging circumstances before, but never one with a hurricane of emotions. It was almost impossible not to get tangled in all the sentiments pouring in. I felt a twinge of helplessness. As much as I wanted them to recuperate and reunite with their families, I knew it was not possible for some of them.

Clearly, this is not just an infectious pandemic, but also a pandemic of fear, panic, concern, and numerous unanswered questions. Amongst all this uncertainty, one thing remains certain; The Covid – 19 came without a warning and will leave having created history.

As I stepped out, I realized that the baggage I carried as I entered the ICU, was much lighter than the baggage carried by these patients.