

# Living with Corona

My name is Dr. Unnati Amatya, I am an obstetrician and gynecologist, working in Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital. Also known as Prasuti Griha, the first maternity hospital of Nepal located in the heart of Kathmandu. It is established in August 1959 and has 415 beds. About 15,000 women deliver their babies in this hospital annually.

Nepal is one of the most isolated nations in the world, wedged between India and China in the Himalaya Mountains. The first case in Nepal was confirmed on 23 January 2020 when a 31-year-old student, who had returned to Kathmandu from Wuhan on 9 January, tested positive. For 2 months, he was the only confirmed COVID-19 case in the entire country. During these two months the government of Nepal took several crucial steps to prevent the outbreak of the disease: by collecting essential equipment and medicines, training medical health workers and public awareness through media for the preparedness.

The first transmission case was confirmed on Kailali district on 4<sup>th</sup> April and the first death due to corona virus was on 14<sup>th</sup> May. A nationwide lockdown was into effect from 5<sup>th</sup> of March till 21st July. In August 19th, ministry of health and population has confirmed a total of 28,938 cases and total death of 120 till date. So far, 529,427 PCR tests have been performed in 40 laboratories across the country.

During the months of lockdown, the situation was quite intense in the capital Kathmandu, as the grocery stores and local markets were shut. Locals were having trouble finding groceries because limited time was scheduled for buying essentials. This led to an immense anxiety among locals and confusion, as they were not sure why the lockdown was carried on, as the outbreak was only in China and not in Nepal. So many non medical but well educated people were violating the rules of lockdown, thus the country's policemen were enforcing a strict lockdown with seizing of the vehicles and paying fine charges etc. During the starting of the pandemic and the lockdown, more than 75% people from Kathmandu left to their hometown as they had perception to be safe in home than here. Similarly, from the local ward office, the leaders organized ration donation program for the ones in need, such as the people who were jobless and work on daily wages. A portion of free ration was distributed in local area in the hope of ending the pandemic and lockdown soon. As the days

passed by, the number of jobless people increased, but the supports for the ration were limited. Hence the ward leaders were unable to provide the supplies as per needed. When the first transmission was seen in Kailali, people panicked and started to rethink as Kathmandu as the safest place to escape from Corona. But they were unaware that by the local transportation, one of them was infected with Corona and carriers were among them. In spite of the efforts from the government and health workers, the viral disease has been detected in all provinces and districts of the country, and Kathmandu being the worst hit district till date.

The first reported death of Covid-19 on May 14th was a 29-year-old woman on her 8th postpartum day of a normal delivery. She presented in Dhulikhel hospital with fever and respiratory symptoms where her PCR test came out to be positive. Since the first case of death was an obstetrics case, we, health workers and our hospital, were more concerned as the pregnant lady is more immune suppressed and more prone to the infection.

The government of Nepal appointed certain hospitals in each province for the test procedure and as a covid-19 hospital for the proper allotment of the suspected patients and their treatment. Our hospital is a government hospital and the patient flow is quite a major issue during the normal times but after the outbreak and the first death due to corona, local and other patients were more anxious, as they were afraid they would get corona from the allotted hospitals. So, the patients from all over the country gathered in our hospital hoping for the proper treatment during their pregnancy. This led to an overload of the patients in Outpatient department as well as the emergency department.



*A part of patients in our OPD after the outbreak during the lockdown.*

As the time passed by, the number of Corona cases was increasing in the Kathmandu. Along with the patients, the health workers were suffering from mental disturbance and anxiety. The government of Nepal had issued the strict rule that no hospitals can be shut down during the covid-19 outbreak, including the private one. Government had appointed certain hospitals as covid-19 hospitals where suspected patients were taken in.

As per in our hospital, a separate “Triage” room is allocated where the suspected cases are screened, evaluated and tested by the on duty doctor. Since the test report take a longer time, the suspected patient is safely transferred to an isolation ward in another branch of our hospital located 200meter away from the main hospital for observation. If the report turns out to be negative, the patient is sent to the main hospital. If the test result is positive she is transferred safely to the main covid-19 hospital, as our hospital is not appointed and funded as covid-19 hospital by the government.

Similarly, the psychological conditions of medical workers in our nation shows that some medical workers have different degrees of anxiety and depression as many lost their loved ones and many suffered from the infection during the treatment of the covid-19 patients and may have various degree of trauma. Thus, it's very crucial to provide them emotional and psychological support.

Nepal lacks the medical equipment needed to treat and control a large outbreak, as there are only few hospital beds, especially outside of big cities. The entire country of 28 million people has 450 ventilators till date. The World Health Organization's representative in Nepal, Jos Vandelaer, MD, MPH is concerned that Nepal is a developing country which is still recovering from the many consequences of the massive 2015 earthquake, is among the poorest

countries who will be disproportionately affected by this pandemic.

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