

## **“Hear our voices: Internationals are also part of corona sufferings”**

“The world needed a break, a much-needed break” may be the only consolation prize for the world inhabitants from nature, which in return takes away from our lives and laughs. Nobody ever seen such a silent world before like a super speedy car has just crashed and stopped. “The rapid ‘globalization’ of the COVID-19 pandemic is something that the world perhaps has never encountered before” (Barua, 2020, p. 2).

The outbreak of novel coronavirus is the most pressing issue at this time. It is declared as a pandemic and named as COVID-19 by WHO. Nobody ever thought 2020 will come with such havoc. 210 countries, more than 240,000 dead, and more than 3.4 million people affected with COVID-19 around the world (Mohiuddin, 2020). In terms of economic losses, scholars are predicting that it will bring economic recession and depression in no time (Barua, 2020). And when we look at the world health system in this corona time, we find how unprepared they were to fight with a virus that, according to ICN, at least 90,000 health care workers have been affected, more than 260 nurses have died during this period (Kenny, 2020), which is an irreparable loss to the world while we already struggling with a shortage of health care professionals around the world. Now it is a matter of question, whether these valuable lives are wasted for reason or is it a predetermined game of the superpower. As Norwegian Vaccine scientist Birger Sørensen has claimed that, “When we technically describe the virus, we see that it has not come about as a natural development. It’s done by the Americans and Chinese as part of what’s called “gain of function” studies. It is being done all over the world. You say you do not but it happens all the time in advanced labs” (Ellingsen, 2020). It appears that health care professionals are the last weapon to be used to cure political turmoil. The question is if the issue could be handled politically among the superpowers then the thousands of potential health care professionals would not die in this fake pandemic. However, and whatever the reason, this is the time to rethink the health system for all the countries in the world. As a going to be health care professionals I will share my thoughts and experiences here and I would like to thank from deep of my heart to SHE for the initiatives they have taken for the international students.

Since as an international student I face an incredibly hard time in education during this time. As well as living in abroad with my daughter and husband, leaving behind my all near ones in Bangladesh give me a continuous societal and mental pressure on me.

**Educational sufferings from the perspective of me and my peers:** The opportunity and privileges for international students are appreciable in Norway. Many international students are now preferring to study in Norway considering all the pros and cons. Norway is becoming enriched with diversified knowledge and expertise from different countries. I do also admit that being an international student in this beautiful country is a blessing for me that I find myself sound, healthy, and very keen to learn new things in such a beautiful and leading university in Europe. I had never imagined that; corona will muzzle my study in such away.

The University of Oslo have declared to close their buildings and physical teaching from 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. But the number of increasing patients every day makes me conscious and tense that I choose to stay at home with my family from 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020. I have missed several lectures as well. I was quite shocked seeing everything opened at that time. The learning process has extremely hampered in corona time. I must admire the initiative taken by the University for online teaching very prompt. But there is a significant difference between online and physical classes. That makes me feel that I am not deeply attached to learning. As well as the group discussion was missed a lot. The learning and education systems are different from our country to Norway. I was just starting to cope up with the system, meanwhile, the corona distorted everything. The online teaching was not easily understandable as it is in a physical class. Moreover, internet speed and zoom class with family especially with a child was challenging to concentrate. Even I have an exam before kindergarten started and it was a memorable day for me to remember. Thanks to the preventive measures taken by FHI and kindergarten that I feel safe to send my daughter back to the kindergarten happily. Last but not least I and some of my peers find the exam question extremely hard in this semester. Teachers had also warned us that we are giving home exams with all kinds of help material so the question will be a little more difficult and different. Sometimes the exams were too hard and hectic that we did not get time to have a sip of water and even go to the washroom. Corona appears as a punishment this year for the examinee. Besides that, I and my peers who are living in the student area especially in Kringsjå and Solvang faces huge sound pollution for the renovation activity by SIO. SIO has received several complaints regarding the issue, as the students could not go to school this time and need to study from home but SIO is not yet ready to stop their work. The sound is terrific that bothers the study too much.

**Financial and social sufferings from the perspective of me and my peers:** The financial sufferings of international students know no bound till now. “Due to the Covid-19 virus,

international students in Norway face major financial challenges”(Amine Fquihi, 2020). My home page on Facebook is now filled with seeing my peers asking and looking for any kind of part-time job. I am neither different from that need. It was embarrassing while the Minister of Research and Higher Education, Henrik Asheim, states that the students outside the EEA actually have enough money to support themselves (Amine Fquihi, 2020), which is not the real case. The living expense is very high in Norway that it is not feasible to spend the savings for a long time for a student. I know some friends are asking for money from their family living abroad, which makes them very embarrassed. UiO has offered financial help in the last month to the students but with special requirements which are most of the time don't match with the applicants. Many students were rejected to get the money which was the last option for many students as far I know. Besides that, many students were also in fear to take the help from NAV because of difficulty in visa processing at a later time and others were not just eligible to get the money because of the job contract given by the employer. Moreover, when I talked to my peers about their financial difficulties, they seem now are more afraid of arranging money for the visa processing and deposit money in next semester renewal following losing the student visa and further study. Moreover, It is also necessary to take care of the mental health of international students especially from China that they don't face any hate crimes regarding corona (Zhai & Du, 2020). Hence, there is also the pressure of paying rent every month which distorted the students heavily to concentrate on their studies. A petition has also signed towards SIO to rebate at least one month's rent, but SIO as usual not in hearing mode during the crisis time. Seems they are only concerned about business and profit.



However, when I tried to apply for state loan fund (Lånkassen) there are too many rules for international students. An international student needs to complete 180 credits to be eligible for Lånkassen. This disappointed me a lot, because I don't know how I will survive with my family if I don't get the support from Lånkassen. I do regret these rules because an international student must fight in every way staying in a new environment, hence fight for financial help put extra stress on me. A bit sluggish in rules during this crisis time by keeping in mind that no one can escape from paying back this loan, will necessarily help the internationals to continue and concentrate on their studies. However, a big thanks to the Lånkassen for lowering the interest rate considering the crisis for corona (Garza, 2020).

Financial difficulties can be solved anyway but the mental pressure I went through during the time is irreparable. Every morning I wake up with the news of death from my home country Bangladesh. During the semester's final exam, I got six death news in two days from my near and dear ones, that completely break me down. I feel quite unable to sit for the exam, but I had to. There is no control over the pandemic in Bangladesh. I know how jeopardized lives are leading by my family that keeps me sleepless at night. I am not leading a normal peaceful life

rather my everyday start and end with horror. Sometimes I feel like it is a curse to be born in a poor country where there is no one to think for you. Government is not aware of you, hospitals are not going to admit you, society is not accepting you, medicines will not be affordable for you and many more. The present myth in Bangladesh, once you have affected with corona you can no longer come back to the society and relatives. These corona survivor people are now homeless made by their family, the ugliest truth ever. The suicide case has also increased in Bangladesh, mostly for the financial insolvency (Bhuiyan, Sakib, Pakpour, Griffiths, & Mamun, 2020). When I think of myself as a health care worker in Bangladesh, I fall into a puzzle that where should I start to fight? To society, to the system, to politics???

### **Examples of coping strategies and advice based on the experiences of me and my peers:**

The first strategy and advice are that we need to listen to nature. It is not new that the world is facing an epidemic and pandemic after years. But do we have the preparations for that? “Preparedness is the key to addressing any health crisis” (Anwar, Nasrullah, & Hosen, 2020). We may claim to China that they did not provide honest information regarding corona. But only blaming them will not necessarily solve the problem now. Bill Gates in his TED talk has warned the world after Ebola “In the next epidemic, such delays could result in a global disaster” (Gates, 2015). But did we take that too seriously? At the starting time of corona when the director-general of WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that, no country will be free from this virus and it’s the time to take actions to prevent it in every way (Stephanie Nebehay, 2020), then we see some kind of negligence among the people and government. People were making fun of corona and finally made it a “corona meme” on social media. Airport was open that one of my friends on the way from Africa was surprised that she faced several checkings in all airports except Oslo international airport. In my opinion, if the government could stop winter vacation, following the checking in airport and could implement quarantine right after the arrival in the early enough time then the situation will not be worse like this. As of now the registered case in Norway is 8620 affected people and 242 deaths.

Understanding early enough the situation helped me most to survive in this corona time with my family. I have stockpiled, but not hoarded up, the necessary things for my baby, and bought necessary basic food from an immigrant shop before they raise prices and become unavailable. And it truly happened that afterward those groceries were not available in the market, if available it was a high price. I often used to go to stores once in a two-week taking all the preventive measures before and after the going out. I used to buy the only very necessary things to run the daily life because prices begin to rise like 1% and my savings was going to finish

soon. I made a talk with my daughter about not wasting food at this time which was helpful, and I have tried that she realizes this is an exceptional time that we cannot go outside as we did before. The speech from Erna Solberg (Prime Minister of Norway) to the kids was commendable that the kids feel and understand themselves as an important part of this crisis. A big thanks to the Prime Minister.

### **Reflections on how student exchange can further develop in the post-corona time:**

According to Simon Marginson, director of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the University of Oxford, "The overall position for international education is that it's going to take a massive hit. I think that we're looking at least a five-year recovery period in terms of the global numbers of people who move between countries for education" (Bothwell, 2020). This is sad for not having new international faces in August. Rather at some departments in the faculty of medicine, it requires an exchange semester in other countries of Europe. But it is not quite feasible to allow students to enter or leave Norway at this time. I would like to request that, if it is possible then please give the exchange students some more time to stay here in Norway until the world gets normal because I remember one of my exchange student friends called me at midnight and asked me timidly if she had to leave Norway now. Somehow, I assured her that she does not need to leave Norway now but don't know how long she can feel herself free from this stress. However, in my opinion, during the corona time and the post corona time the online study should be carried on at least one year for local and international students is staying in their homeland to prevent the spread of corona. Another possible suggestion is if the government allows international students to come to Norway then extra checking measures should be taken in the airport including testing, quarantine, etc.

### **Reflections on how my own experiences during corona-time can affect my future work as a health worker in my country/context:**

From childhood, I had been always dreaming to do something that is directly connected with the betterment of people in my country. Getting the opportunity to study in the faculty of medicine has helped to run after my dream. Though my profession will not be a doctor or nurse that I could directly connect with people, I can make some contribution to creating and implementing policies that can make a better health system especially in a developing country like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is following the traditional health system until now. There is no digitalization in the health system. People are choosing their doctors according to their financial ability. Skimming, dumping, false negative, false positive are the regular practices in all the government, non-government, private hospitals in Bangladesh. The government has a very small budget for health. Not only that, but they also don't know how to use this small budget to gain cost efficiency and cost-effectiveness. There is no specialization knowledge area and institution available in this regard. The government has to depend on the decision of ministers, and those decisions are mostly done without expertise calculation. That creates the shortfall of resources, misuse of resources, and sometimes unnecessary uses of resources.

This corona pandemic in Bangladesh makes me feel the importance of my study to implement in my country. Staying in Norway in this corona time is such a blessing for me that I can see how efficiently and effectively they handle the situation. The National Institute of Public Health and all other independent organizations work together that Norway could recover the situation very soon. I have a plan to utilize my knowledge that the government starts to rethink the health system with the proper acknowledgment of cost efficiency so that the country can better its health system with a limited resource. This is also a sustainable goal of the UN to qualify future health workers to make holistic decisions that safeguard the resources and needs of the future.

### **Reflections on sustainable health care in the light of the COVID-19 crisis:**

“Strengthening health care systems not only improves our ability to deal with epidemics, but it also promotes health more broadly. Without a functioning health system, it is very hard for a country to end the cycle of disease and poverty. Health is so fundamental to development that even if there were no chance of another epidemic, building and improving health systems would be a worthwhile — and lifesaving — investment. The fact that they also bolster our ability to confront epidemics is all the more reason to invest in them” (Gates, 2015). Sustainable health care means not only to respond in the crisis moment, but it needs to have long term preparedness and consciousness among the health care professionals to respond on the right time with the right resources. It's sad but true that no country was as prepared as it requires to deal with corona. We see the shortage of health care personnel, mask, PPE, vaccine, ICU, ventilator, hygiene in all over the world. Even we have watched how the USA fall in shortages whereas, Taiwan create an example by fulfilling their own and international needs of supply. It is critically important to have the connection and combination of the national health system

with the local health system that countries like Taiwan and Vietnam become an example to overcome corona.

Corona has also taught us mental health is extremely important for the patients and health workers. Now it becomes an increasingly important issue to take care of the mental health of front-line health workers and patients. It should be noted that health care workers who are working in such a pandemic have no earlier knowledge or experience to deal with patients, thus creating the vulnerability in mental health for both of them (Lima et al., 2020).

The developed country can tackle their crisis with money, but to gain holistic sustainable health care the rich country and international organization should come forward with more funding as well as need to monitor the proper uses of funding over the poor countries. Besides the therapeutic measures, vaccine initiation should be started without wasting any minute and make it easily affordable all over the world.

**Reflections on ethical issues in professional decision making in light of the COVID-19 crisis and/or in post-corona time:**

Tuning with the vision statement of SHE: “*Globally anchored health professionals make sustainable healthcare decisions without compromising future and global needs*” I want to say that, working and implementing new thing in my country will not be necessarily easy but I will try my best to provide the health system a better, fair, sustained look. I know the forthcoming obstacles in my life but the scholarship from SHE has given me the courage that I will not compromise my desire with anything to keep my little contribution to create a sustainable health system. I can trust myself that, despite facing huge financial crisis I did not forget my promise with me that if I get the scholarship, I will spend some of it for the people of Bangladesh and I am on the way doing that and I firmly believe, there will be one fine morning very soon where there will be no crisis, no differences in people to get their required health facilities all over the world.



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