Letters to the Editor

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The COVID-19 Pandemic Is a Battle Against Disease, Fear, and Misinformation

To the Editor: As a family physician from the United States involved in the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic response in China, I have been struck by the threefold battle that health care professionals are fighting globally, not only against the disease but also against fear and misinformation.

The immense volume of new case reports, shifting diagnostic criteria, and treatment protocols challenge even those health care professionals with the sharpest information skills. Our anxieties about contaminating ourselves and exposing our colleagues and loved ones are compounded by shortages of personal protective equipment and deaths of colleagues that remind us of our mortality. Lastly, the cloud of misinformation and online rumors requires us to be actively engaged as sources of reliable information for the public, so as not to let other voices mislead the public discourse and our political leaders.

As we face these challenges, family physicians must redouble our efforts to advance our profession for the well-being of our communities. Despite our best individual efforts, the only way to fulfill our mission of caring for all, especially the vulnerable, requires a whole-of-society coordinated approach, including the full support of government and private sectors. Despite protective physical barriers, we must not insulate ourselves emotionally from our patients but allow ourselves to grieve alongside their loved ones. We also need to engage in difficult conversations with one another, to affirm and explore rather than suppress our emotional responses to demanding situations, helping one another cope with the deeply personal toll of this pandemic.

I am honored to have witnessed the bravery and solidarity displayed by colleagues who volunteered to go to Hubei province. Others tirelessly treated patients in our hospital’s infectious disease ward and screened thousands of patients with symptoms in fever clinics, ports of entry, and communities. As we grieved the loss of one young physician in our province, we also celebrated the release from our hospital of a successfully treated three-month-old girl who had contracted COVID-19. Despite our relief when the last confirmed patient with COVID-19 in our province was discharged, our vigilance continues.

In times like these, we as a global health care community must advocate for and protect the vulnerable, comfort those who are grieving, and honor the many brave colleagues who are willingly putting themselves at risk. I wish you all courage and safety and look forward to the day when we can celebrate a hard-won victory together after a long and challenging fight.

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References


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