



Invited Commentary

A commentary on “World Health Organization declares global emergency: A review of the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)”



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Sohrabi et al. [1] have reviewed the latest situation and knowledge about a novel coronavirus that has caused an outbreak of a deadly human infectious disease, named as the COVID-19. World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 [2]. The authors have summarised many issues concerning the COVID-19 such as the clinical presentation, epidemiology, treatment, prognosis, prevalence, prevention and response to the outbreak [1]. More importantly, while pointing out the lessons learned, they have highlighted the importance of a number of critical issues, particularly the timeliness of providing information about COVID-19, starting with preventative measures such as quarantine of suspected cases and travel restrictions to contain the outbreak, and taking effective measures to stop the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 [1].

WHO data on COVID-19 show 118,382 confirmed cases and 4,292 deaths in 114 countries [3]. Notably, 66,687 cases of COVID-19 have recovered so far [4]. However, the situation is changing fast and the number of confirmed cases, deaths and survivors is expected to increase rapidly.

WHO has estimated the preliminary COVID-19 transmission rate (R_0) (reproductive number or the average number of people to which a single infected person will transmit the virus) between 1.4 and 2.5 [5], while others have reported higher values of R_0 from 3.6 to 4.0 [6]. These values should be compared to the R_0 of 1.3 for common flu and R_0 of 2.0 for SARS [7]. While the R_0 is greater than 1, the epidemic will continue [8]; however, when R_0 is less than 1, the virus should slowly disappear [7].

The consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak are not only limited to human infection and deaths, but also have associated social

repercussions, including racial and xenophobic attacks [9] and adverse economic implications, which have badly affected the travel industry [10], disrupted the supply chain [11] and stock exchanges [12], and slowed the global economy [13].

Governments and public health authorities around the world have taken several steps to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 such as the introduction of a new legislation in England to protect the public by restricting or detaining those suspected of carrying the coronavirus [14]. Additionally, some countries have also banned large public gatherings to contain the spread of the coronavirus. For example, France has put a ban on crowds of more than 5000 people [15] and Saudi Arabia has temporarily stopped religious pilgrims (both foreign and local) from visiting Makkah and Madinah -Islam's two holiest places in the country [16]. Italy has put the entire country in quarantine with 12,462 total cases and 827 deaths [7].

Governments and (public) health authorities alone cannot succeed in combating the outbreak. People need to protect themselves and others from contracting COVID-19 by following public health advice, adopting the suggested preventive measures, and complying with the guidance issued by health authorities.

Nonetheless, public access to timely and authentic information concerning health emergency situations like the COVID-19 outbreak is vital. Otherwise, people may be misled by a plethora of false information being disseminated through different channels, possibly leading to fear and distress. There are signs of public panic such as the bulk buying of face masks and hand sanitisers leading to empty shelves in supermarkets in some towns and cities. Restoring the confidence of the general public in public health measures is crucial, otherwise public fear and apprehension might limit the local, national, regional and

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international efforts and measures aimed at tackling the COVID-19 outbreak.

Containment of the COVID-19 is critical, and it is only possible through the joint and coordinated efforts and cooperation between diverse stakeholders at local, national and global levels. Some countries involved in COVID-19 outbreak might need international support due to their weak health systems, lack of resources and diagnostic kits, and poor economic situations such as Iran facing international sanctions [17]. More importantly, there is an acute need for the pooling of resources in research and development, including development of a vaccine and effective medicines to combat the deadly COVID-19.

Provenance and peer review

Invited Commentary, internally reviewed.

Declaration of competing interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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