



Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

PEOPLE'S HEALTH MOVEMENT - MUMBAI

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To,

Shri.Praveen Pardeshi, IAS
Municipal Commissioner
Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai
Municipal Head Office, Mahapalika Marg
Mumbai - 400 001, Maharashtra

05. April.2020

Subject: Issues and safety concerns being faced by frontline nurses in Mumbai while treating COVID 19 patients.

Dear Sir,

We, the representatives Jan Swasthya Abhiyan Mumbai, United Nurses Association Maharashtra, Clinical Nursing Research Society, and Nursing and Paramedical Staff Union Mumbai are writing to you with regards to the coronavirus epidemic in Mumbai. Maharashtra has emerged as an epicentre and the state is facing its worst public health crisis. Mumbai has reported the highest number of cases in the state. The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has identified nearly 200 containment zones in the city of Mumbai.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care personnel especially nurses are the worst hit. Nurses have been staging protests demanding PPE, highlighting the gravity of the issue. The condition in rural India is even worse. Worldwide nearly 100 doctors and nurses have laid their life fighting against this COVID-19. Nurses have been working overtime without any compensation. Nurse form the pivot around which health care in India revolves. At this moment if we fail to think about them and let them get infected, we are making way for another disastrous route of spread of infection through the health personnel to lay patients visiting hospitals. Many of these are working middle class women, who along with work also have family's dependent on them. Providing them with proper PPE, safe transportation facility, nutritious food and work place safety, assurance about their family and support in any untoward incidents arising due to this epidemic is a duty of the state. Nurses should be given their due respect in this fight rather than counting them as a subordinate and neglecting their rightful demands. Nurses exposed to positive patients are kept in quarantine till their report comes. If the results are negative nurses are being asked to join their duties, without finishing the 14 day protocol of quarantine.

There are news reports on the rise of infection among healthcare workers, specially nurses in the hospitals of Mumbai. Health services have been severely affected in at least four hospitals in Mumbai. At a time when we need to expand public health services by leveraging all resources- public and private- at the disposal of the state, it is alarming to note that the institutional and workforce capacity of the health system is getting diminished because of healthcare workers getting infected. Hospitals have become hotbeds of infection and are at risk of perpetuating, instead of treating, coronavirus.

We are writing to you to highlight specific **issues being faced by nursing staff in public and private hospitals in Mumbai.**

- The supply and availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for nursing staff is not adequate. Given the hierarchy in the medical profession, nurses are undervalued and under supported and do not get the attention they require as frontline workers. Out of all the staff members they are usually the ones exposed to patients the longest. It is sad to see that many nurses are appealing to charitable institutions to donate PPE. The responsibility to get protective gear should not fall on the shoulders of nurses. This should be the responsibility of the administration and the state. Further, even when donations in terms of supplies are being received, the nurses do not get access to the protective gear.
- Adequate precautions for infection control and triaging are not being taken by hospitals which is putting the safety of nurses at risk. Follow up of these cases have shown that they are not about occupational hazard, as much as they are about negligence of the hospital management.
- Many nurses who are working in hospitals providing treatment and care for COVID patients are living at home and using public transport to commute between their homes and the hospital. Unless adequately protected from the infection, they could become carriers of coronavirus and unknowingly spread it among the community.
- Adequately nutritious food is not being made available to nurses who are working in hospitals. Lack of nutritious food compromises immunity and puts the nurses at risk of coronavirus.
- There are reports of facilities not being appropriate for nurses who have been quarantined in hospitals. They have not been provided beds, mattresses or food in the rooms where they have been quarantined.

- Nurses are being made to work overtime without allowing adequate rest and opportunity to recuperate. This also compromises their immunity, safety and health.
- Hospitals are not being transparent in providing COVID test results to nurses who are suspected of having COVID 19.
- Nursing personnel are not represented in decision making bodies of the government. Thus, their issues and concerns are not being highlighted at the appropriate forums and are unaddressed.
- Nurses who are bringing lapses in treatment and care to public notice are being harassed and scolded by the management of hospitals. As per hospital sources quoted in media reports from a leading national newspaper almost all 265 nurses are under observation to contain further spread in one private hospital alone. There are reports of nurses being asked to continue working despite being advised quarantine. Nurses have also reported that they are being scolded by senior staff and management for speaking out about their working conditions.

All the above is causing a lot of anxiety and fear among nurses who are at the frontline of the epidemic, and are vulnerable to contracting coronavirus, and subsequently becoming carriers of the same. In order to effectively tackle the coronavirus epidemic, the safety of frontline nurses must be taken seriously. Hospital management and administrators may be stretched but unethical practices cannot be allowed to persist. The World Health Organisation has clearly mentioned rights of health workers which must be ensured.

Given the above situation, we demand the following:

1. Hospitals must ensure adequate supply of PPE is available. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has laid down clear protocols for use of PPE stratified as per risk. These must be strictly followed to ensure safety of nurses.
2. Hospitals must ensure safety for all nursing staff by putting in place proper infection control and triaging protocols. Quarantine period of 14 days must be maintained irrespective of COVID test result.
3. Nurses posted in COVID ward or isolation should be formally given training about working in such wards and measures to take if any mishap occurs. Especially when new facilities are

planned or arranged in peripheral hospitals, a parallel system for nurse's needs, trainings, and orientation must be formed with involvement of matron of the hospitals.

4. Hospitals must ensure appropriate working hours with breaks and nutritious meals for all nursing staff.
5. Ensure access to mental health and counselling services for nurses.
6. Diploma or BSc. Nursing students must not be used for management of COVID19 positive or suspected patients. In case of staff shortage, they can be used for general patients or non covid19 positive patients care.
7. Nurses who are pregnant or have comorbidities should not be put on duty in the COVID ward. They can be assigned to any other appropriate tasks within their professional role which does not expose them to risk of COVID.
8. Allow workers to exercise the right to remove themselves from a work situation that they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent danger to their life or health. When a health worker exercises this right, they shall be protected from any undue consequences.
9. Accommodation for nurses must be ensured close by to hospitals to minimise the need for travel and restrict the spread of infection to family members of nurses and community.
10. Minimum 5-6 days advance notice must be given to nurses who are transferred from one hospital to other. Hospitals must provide them residential accommodation.
11. Hospitals must desist from shaming and pulling up nurses who are highlighting issues pertaining to their working conditions and safety.
12. A proper communication channel must be created for Matrons to report to higher nursing authorities or other administration at top level, when local administration authorities, like Medical Superintendent, are not cooperative. Enable cooperation between management of hospitals and nurses and/or their representatives.
13. In case nurses are infected by COVID 19 they should be given treatment, care and support free of cost. Their salaries must be fully protected, and the time taken for treatment and recovery without any pressure of losing salary. They should be counted as on duty for this

time. The state must direct all public and private hospitals to treat nurses free of cost. In case of death during duty, the family should get financial compensation.

14. Private hospitals must adhere to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare guidelines, regularly report to MCGM / state administration about number COVID 19 positive patients, number of nurses quarantined, and care being provided for COVID19 patients.
15. Nursing personnel must be included in all state-wide committees of the Maharashtra government to ensure their participation in decision making so that their concerns and needs are addressed.

We hope that you will look into the concerns raised and work towards implementation of our recommendations.

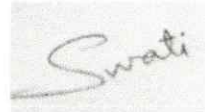
Sincerely,



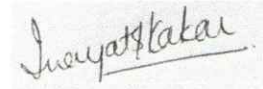
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Kamayani Mahabal & Avinash Kadam (Co-Convenors, JSA Mumbai)

On behalf of

1. Jan Swasthya Abhiyan Mumbai
2. United Nurses Association (UNA) Maharashtra
3. Clinical Nursing Research Society (CNRS)
4. Nursing and Paramedical Staff Union Mumbai

CC to:

- Principal Secretary (Public Health Department), Government of Maharashtra
- Hon'ble Minister of Public Health and Family Welfare, Government of Maharashtra
- Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Maharashtra