

June 13, 2020

To
Health Minister
Government of Telangana
Hyderabad

Dear Sir,

Sub: ***Expression of concern regarding events at Gandhi Hospital (10th June 2020)***
(Copy Marked to Chief Secretary and Principal Health Secretary)

We the undersigned are senior health professionals, public health administrators, teachers, activists and members of civil society. We would like to express our worry about the problems faced with the governmental response to the COVID-19 epidemic which is ravaging the state. We are not affiliated to any political party and we support the government's attempts to handle this difficult crisis.

The unfortunate event of 10th June where a Junior Doctor was beaten up by attenders of a deceased patient has brought to light some of the difficulties being faced by them. It is quite clear that this event occurred because of the dire need for improvement in handling COVID-19 patients in the only functioning special COVID wing in Telangana at Gandhi Hospital. The cogent demands of the junior doctors are from the absolute frontline of treatment in these difficult conditions, and thus reflect a clear understanding of the problems they face. Frontline workers such as these doctors deserve the administrative support of the government and acknowledgement of their invaluable contribution to society in these difficult times. They are the young, brave future leaders of the medical profession who are forging their experience and character by caring for patients in the evolving pandemic of this unknown disease.

It is gratifying that the government has responded to the strike and has promised to address the situation at the earliest.

The demands of the Junior Doctors are particularly important feedback to improve the treatment of COVID-19 patients. These points are critical, given the increasing pressure that the system is expected to face in the coming days. We also add some further suggestions to better the situation immediately and without great cost. They are:

- Improve immediately the infrastructure and functioning at Gandhi Hospital to handle all cases of COVID-19 admitted there.
- Decentralize with careful planning treatment of COVID-19 cases at various levels of health facilities including district hospitals to prevent mounting pressure on a single hospital leading to the crumbling of already inadequate infrastructure.
- Operationalize fully the newly inaugurated Gachibowli COVID-19 specialty hospital as fast as possible.
- Take immediate steps to augment and strengthen manpower, including specialist doctors, broad specialty doctors, nursing staff, paramedical staff, ward boys, patient care providers and others as needed on a long term basis.

- Plan adequate staff relief by proper shift rotation to tired young doctors, nurses and attending staff as they work round the clock to treat patients.
- Provide proper resting rooms with comfortable beds for the nurses and for other attending staff since they too will be extremely tired working on these patients.
- Make provisions for mental health support services for frontline workers, as this crisis is taking a heavy toll on their health and well-being.
- Provide adequate numbers of high quality PPE kits, N95 masks to all healthcare workers at all public hospitals across the state.
- Deploy security personnel with masks and other protective gear to advise patients and control movement/misconduct.
- Include representatives from frontline medical staff in the advisory committee to the Health Ministry, to raise problems faced by junior doctors, nurses and attendants since this is direct feedback from the COVID frontline situation.
- Involve private hospitals but with a reasonable price limit for all patients, and with Aarogyasri coverage for BPL patients who have white ration cards.

We strongly urge you to use these inputs to ensure the success of the Telangana State Government's COVID-19 response programme.

Yours Sincerely
(Signed)

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