

**Management of Swine Flu: New Approaches**

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Madam, with the rise of reported influenza cases in Pakistan,<sup>1</sup> and lack of public health initiatives, we feel that medical and dental students can be effectively utilized as a disaster response and management team. For this reason, it was imperative to test the awareness and self-care practices of medical and dental students. We also felt there was paucity of literature available for health care professionals and policy makers to implement precautionary guidelines. Hence, we conducted a survey taking into account medical and dental students, as both of them are directly exposed to infected individuals during clinical practices.<sup>2</sup> A study done by Hussain et al.<sup>3</sup> in 2012 reflected upon the limited knowledge of medical students regarding preventative measures of swine flu virus. A similar study done in 2010 by KhowajaZA et al.<sup>4</sup> emphasized on the subpar knowledge of medical students, reinforcing the idea that medical professionals are not prepared for a public health crisis. Indeed, since then Pakistan has seen a significant rise in diagnosed swine flu cases with the number being 150 in January 2016.<sup>5</sup>

Our study aimed to reassess the works of previous surveys, and consequently gauge if our findings were in line with those of the former studies.<sup>2</sup> The results indicate limited knowledge of dental students concerning signs and symptoms and communication modes. This warrants a need for not only medical but dental schools to incorporate swine flu awareness in the curriculum, and enforce safety strategies to counteract this pandemic. Even though Pakistan is at risk of an epidemic, unfortunately no implementation of the recommendations made by previous studies is seen in the curriculum. There is also no appreciable difference in perceptions of students towards protective measures, once again reflecting the lax attitude of the authorities. A dialogue needs to be initiated by the government to prevent the rise of communicable, preventable diseases. These diseases are a burden on the already scarce health care resources.

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Furthermore, when medical students get absent from school, they not only utilize health care, but also negatively impact their school performance. This can be avoided by effective vaccinations. However, if a student contracts the swine flu virus, the administration should allow them a medical leave of absence. It is unethical to consciously spread the virus. The practices of students were inappropriate, with the use of a facemask being a rarity.<sup>1</sup>

Medical and dental students also act as role models for friends and family. Hand washing practices can have a sustained effect on the community's hygiene and in turn prevent the easy transmission of the influenza virus. This has the potential to become a norm if taken up seriously by authorities and medical students alike. With the increasing mortality by swine flu in Pakistan,<sup>1</sup> it is high time the government take serious action and train the grass root level of medical professionals, including dentists. Our study proves the need to establish a framework for preventive measures that can be taken up by institutions and hospital administrations. We suggest an effective incorporation of guidelines in medical and dental curriculum, as well as implementation of preventative strategies in health care settings. Policy needs to be translated into practice.

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