

# PROBLEM STATEMENT

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# CASE SCENARIO

Suravi Ahuja, a 55 year old diabetic and hypertensive, found herself in the middle of the dreaded pandemic, forcefully pulled under the waves of panic when she developed a simple cold on a Tuesday. Though she was no novice when it came to facing medical issues, she always failed at taking care of herself. Living alone, with no helping hand, she was forced to look after herself to the best of her capacity. Sadly, this always reflected in the poor maintenance of her health parameters in terms of her alarmingly high and unregulated blood sugar levels. No sooner had she sneezed, she faced an onslaught of harried messages and calls from neighbors, friends and family, advising her to be 'ready for Covid'.

They had put their fate on word of mouth and forwarded messages than the health system which was struggling in the midst of the pandemic. When disaster comes to our doorstep unannounced, we are reduced to our lowest, forced to accept the darkness surrounding our world. In those harsh times, there was no guarantee in the outside world that a person seeking care would be treated with the dignity they deserved. Witnessing the pain and suffering of loved ones desperately run for highly priced illegal medication, and admission on the floor of a hospital ward only to finally accept their fate and eventual demise, crumbles one's faith. This belief made them urge her to rush to the nearest medical store and stock up on prednisone, a steroid highlighted on every news bulletin and social-media as one of courses of medication for Covid - 19. What she didn't know and didn't care to heed were the precautions that tailed the drug. Her RT – PCR sample confirmed her worst fears when it came out positive.

The Pandemic, with its unprecedented onslaught, struck our weakest spots and really tested the boundaries of the trust carefully built between the health care system and the public over several decades. Their broken trust and wounded faith forced treatment methods to be branded a hoax, an attempt to lure a false safety blanket by proposing a way that did more harm than good. Unfortunately for her, she couldn't escape the manic of the pandemic no matter which corner she turned to. She was assaulted with symptoms of headache, sore throat, cold and sinusitis with one sided facial pain. Eventually she noticed small black discoloration on her nose which slowly worsened her condition. While attempting to find an admission in a hospital the little trust she harbored in health care only dwindled as she was catapulted from one hospital to another, with low bed availability, poor communicability and falling standards. With difficulty, she managed to find a place for herself in a government health institute. Heightened fear and paralyzing anxiety only added to the mix and forced the health care workers to be answerable for the dire situation.

Sreejith Joseph, a 25 year old post graduate, looking poised and calm, was tasked with the duty to record Suravi's case. What couldn't be seen behind the safety kits, coats and masks was the exhaustion, threatening to cripple him. Every case and every history drained him physically and mentally, till it forced him to commit prescribing errors and lapse in patient care with poor communication skills. His years of studies and service took him on a journey where he was taught to test his limits. The hardships of lost sleep, tired eyes and draining reserves, common among his peers, were barely endurable before. Little did they know, they were yet to be truly tested. When the unknown monster reigned supreme, health care workers were forced to pick up the pieces, with no luxury to worry about themselves. They were forced to confront medical nightmares in the hospital with no warning of what to expect. They carried the burden of the disease on their shoulders like it was their own failure. Troubling deaths, and failing health care system made them the only standing warriors fighting the battle at the frontlines, tasked to perform the duties of lakhs of people. Each passing moment only seemed to snuff out their spirit little by little. Plagued by nightmares and traumatized by the suffering, they were left to hope for little less than the worst.

## Comprehending this scenario:

1. Social pressure and misinformation forces individuals to tread into dangerous situations without looking out for the risks that accompany their actions. Trends of increased sale in Antibiotics and steroids only accentuated this fact. In a study conducted by Phalke et al, overall, 52% Indians were estimated to self-medicate in India due to lack of time, to avoid a doctor's fee and internet dependence and it was reported that out of 96.5% of pharmacists who asked the patients about the complaints that made them acquire an over-the-counter drug (OTC), only 51% counseled the patients regarding the instructions to use. [1]

Though OTCs paint a good alternative for a country like India that suffers from a low doctor: patient ratio, their unregulated use causes unnecessary harm to the public. While different countries have formulated regulations for the use of over-the-counter drugs, India has yet to set guidelines for licensing over the counter drugs.

### **How do you propose ways to restrict the misuse of both life threatening and lifesaving drugs that require medical supervision and a physician's council to safely administer?**

2. Over 92 % don't trust healthcare system in India [2]. Trust is a delicate bridge built between two parties, on the foundation of their actions, to help them meet mid-way. It encompasses vulnerability and faith in each other and takes time to form. Trust takes us a long way, pushing us to make a decision that has the power to dictate our well-being. It involves the public, the health care workers and the administrators dictating the structure of the system. Though India offers the most affordable and lowest cost healthcare in comparison to several international systems, its services are still restricted to most of the population.

61% patients surveyed in 2019 believed that hospitals did not act in their best interests, and 63% indicated they were not happy with the responsiveness and waiting times and 59% felt that the hospitals are not concerned about feedback and do not act actively seek it. [3]

Repeated failures and overlooked negligence over the years managed to suppress our health care system's reliability.

### **How can we improve a patient's trust in health care and help them choose the right path for themselves?**

3. With the skill to heal and the heart to care, health care workers risk their physical and mental strength every step of the way, to fight for us. Long working hours, physical and verbal abuse from different sources and repressed mental health issues seemed to alleviate their severity of their suffering. The Indian situation only adds to the burden due to higher work demand and lower availability of staff and facilities.

30% of Indian doctors are said to go through depression and 80% face the risk of burnout in the early stages of their career. In an online survey conducted by CDC during the course of the Pandemic, one in three each reported symptoms of depression (32%), anxiety (30.3%), PTSD ( 36.8 %) while nearly 10 % reported planning suicide and the highest prevalence is among those below the age of 29 years. Sleeping and eating disorders, stigma and anxiety were few of the issues that were added to their ever-present torment. [4]

As a coping mechanism, to deal with the lack of control in their situation they seem to internalize and avoid their problems. Studies from India suggested that medical students were poor at seeking professional help for the fear of stigmatization and lack of awareness. Higher working hours were associated with higher levels of depression, stress and burnout. [5]

### **How do we help them fight the unseen devil, to better deal with medical burnout (mental stress, trauma and physical exhaustion) they face during the pandemic?**

## References:

[1] Postgrad Med. 2020 Jan-Mar; 66(1): 28–34.

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[2] <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/over-92-people-dont-trust-healthcare-system-in-india-study/62517023>

[3] [https://www.ey.com/en\\_in/news/2019/08/indian-healthcare-system-reengineered-for-delivering-healthcare](https://www.ey.com/en_in/news/2019/08/indian-healthcare-system-reengineered-for-delivering-healthcare)

[4] <https://weather.com/en-IN/india/coronavirus/news/2021-06-30-over-30-public-health-workers-report-symptoms-of-depression>

[5] <https://www.indianjpsychiatry.org/article.asp?issn=0019-5545;year=2018;volume=60;issue=2;spage=175;epage=188;aulast=Grover#ref16>