

[Six Covid patients die in Peshawar for want of oxygen](#)

[Ashfaq Yusufzai](#) Updated 07 Dec 2020

- **Many shifted to different hospitals as vendor failed to arrive on time**
- **CM seeks report as Khyber hospital orders inquiry**
- **KP govt to hold ‘independent’ probe**

PESHAWAR: For want of oxygen supply, six coronavirus patients in intensive care and isolation units of Peshawar’s Khyber Teaching Hospital died in the early hours of Sunday morning.

As the hospital administration initiated an inquiry into the shortage of oxygen supply that reportedly resulted in the deaths of the patients, including three women, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government sought its report within 48 hours failing which Chief Minister Mahmood Khan said the provincial government would hold an “independent” inquiry.

However, medical fraternity demanded a judicial inquiry into the half a dozen deaths, saying the Supreme Court may take notice of the matter and bring those responsible to justice as doctors have been urging the authorities to ensure proper supply of medicines and oxygen to hospitals while the government has not learnt anything from the first wave of Covid-19.

“The incident occurred at 2:40am on Sunday after which they started shifting other patients to different hospitals while some patients were put on manual oxygenation,” said Farhad Khan, spokesman for the Khyber Teaching Hospital.

He said under a contract, the hospital received 5,000 litres of oxygen daily at 5pm from a supplier but “last night we didn’t get the consignment that resulted in the death of people aged from 45 to 65 years”. He told *AFP* that a disruption in oxygen supplies affected some 200 people, “including 96 Covid-19 patients”, while *AP* quoted him as saying the patients died when the Rawalpindi-based vendor who supplies the hospital with medical oxygen to refill tanks failed to arrive in time.

Mr Khan said the Board of Governors (BoG) formed an inquiry team, led by former dean of the Khyber Medical College Prof Rohul Mugeem, to probe the incident within 24 hours and furnish its report to the government.

Later, the spokesman said: “Recently we have increased the oxygen from 5,000 to 10,000 per litre to cope with the patients’ load after the pandemic and the hospital had decided to get 20,000 litres after the incident.”

Expressing deep concern over the loss of precious lives, the KP chief minister directed the hospital administration to complete the inquiry within 48 hours. In case of failure, the provincial government would hold an independent inquiry itself, the CM declared in a statement. The matter was extremely shocking and the government stood with the bereaved families in these trying times, he said, adding that no one, if found involved in the incident, would be spared.

The chief minister also ordered KP Chief Secretary Dr Kazim Niaz to personally look into the matter and ensure timely completion of the inquiry report.

Corona Week

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Minister Taimur Khan Jhagra told a presser in Islamabad that the report of Peshawar hospital incident would be made public within 24 hours.

Mr Jhagra, who was accompanied by Special Assistant to Chief Minister for Information and Higher Education Kamran Bangash, told the media that as per decision of the National Command and Operation Centre, 'Corona Week' would be observed in the province.

The health minister also expressed deep grief over the six deaths, saying that the incident was not acceptable. He promised strict action against those found responsible.

Earlier, the minister and CM's aide told the joint press conference that a week would be observed in KP to implement SOPs related to coronavirus. They said the protection of life was the responsibility of the state and assured that it would fulfill its responsibilities.

About the inquiry report, Mr Jhagra said: "We are enjoying the trust of our people so we will not hide anything but share whatever we find out." He said the government was committed to improve the health care delivery system. "We will learn lesson from every such incident to avoid such happening in the future," he said.

He said the government was making efforts to maintain the health system and provide better health services though the KP's health system was under pressure due to Covid-19 patients at hospitals.

Judicial inquiry

Meanwhile, the Provincial Doctors' Association in a press release demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident, explaining that not only Covid-19 patients but many other patients were also at risk of losing their lives due to lack of oxygen. "We demand the apex court to take notice of the matter and punish those involved in the incident," it said.

The association said oxygen was important for patients and should be made available at hospitals to prevent occurrence of such episodes in future.

Dr Qaisar Sajjad, secretary general of the Pakistan Medical Association, termed the incident unfortunate and urged the government to increase beds and other facilities for Covid-19 patients to prevent further losses. "We have repeatedly been making mistakes and have not learnt from the experiences. We should have learnt from the first wave of Covid-19. Being representative body of health practitioners, we have already been demanding that the government should ensure additional supplies of medicines and oxygen as the demand will increase with the passage of time. We still warn that there will be more tough time ahead so the government should start preparations," he said.

Prof Syed Amjad Taqweem, a former physician at the Lady Reading Hospital, told *Dawn* that he along with other colleagues had been suggesting to the government to ensure uninterrupted supply of oxygen to the hospitals, but it seemed all such efforts fell on deaf ears.

Ikram Junaidi in Islamabad also contributed to this report

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