

THE MEDICAL GAZETTE

Health For All is a basic human right that needs to be protected at all costs by those who matter. Pakistan Medical Association is doing its bit in this regard and hopes that others will join hands sooner rather than later.

PAKISTAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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Healthcare system is on the slide, warns PMA

GAZETTE REPORT

THE Pakistan Medical Association, Center, released its annual Health of the Nation report which noted with dismay that the status of the national healthcare delivery system continued to be depressing because the policymakers were busy in just about everything except the country's healthcare system which is directly related to the wellbeing of the masses.

PMA Center Secretary-General Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro, unveiling the report along with his professional colleagues, said the worst thing about the who scenario was that the system seemed to be on a slide and was going downwards, which highlights the immediate need for planned interventions to at least stem the slide first. If that was not done, he warned, the national health indicators would continue to go from bad to worse.

"The governments at the federal and provincial levels must admit persistent criminal negligence on their part. Had there been any proper investment in preventive healthcare and education, the situation would have been far better today irrespective of the scale of any disaster that might hit us," said Dr Shoro while addressing the press conference at the PMA House in Karachi where the report was released.

Citing the WHO recommendations, he said the health budget of any country should be at least six per cent of the GDP. In our case, however, the health budget has remained 1.2pc of the GDP out of which 80pc was consumed by salaries and administrative expenditure.

"A major chunk of the remaining 20pc budget allocated for the masses is taken away by corruption, leaving a negligible

amount for poor patients," he said.

The poor performance of successive governments, Dr Shoro pointed out, was very much reflected by our persistent failure to eradicate diseases, such as polio and tuberculosis, and bring down the worryingly high maternal and infant mortality rates.

"Polio has been eradicated from across the world including low-income countries except Afghanistan and Pakistan. We have been at war with polio for decades without success. Iran has totally eradicated polio with just three rounds of countrywide vaccination. We believe that aside from the religious factor, the reason for the country's failure on the polio front was a sheer lack of political will that has hindered the way towards mass public awareness," he said.

According to the PMA report, an estimated 400,000 people died of diabetes in Pakistan in 2021. One in four adults (26.7pc) in Pakistan are living with diabetes, which is the highest national prevalence in the world.

"The prevalence of diabetes in Pakistan has increased significantly since the International Diabetes Association (IDF) estimates published in 2019, according to which 19.4 million adults were suffering from type 2 diabetes mellitus (TsDM), while, according to IDF Diabetes Atlas 2021, the number has reached 33 million.

This means that Pakistan now has the third highest number of people living with diabetes in the world, behind China 141 million and India 74 million," the PMS report noted with concern.

Citing last year's official data, the PMA leaders addressing the press conference said that dengue and malaria

together killed over 80 people in Sindh, out of whom 62 died in Karachi alone. These lives, they said, could have been saved if the patients were able to get proper and timely treatment.

"Unfortunately, mosquito-borne illnesses have become a major threat to public health in Sindh today mainly due to the provincial government's continued failure to take timely measures every year to eliminate their breeding grounds. This negligence played a major role in worsening the situation in the flood-hit areas, said PMA Joint Secretary Dr Vasdev.

The speakers also shared the PMA's concern over infectious diseases spreading due to unhygienic conditions, non-availability of clean drinking water, inadequate sanitation, lack of sewerage facilities and lack of awareness among the masses about their own personal hygiene.

The disease burden was on the rise due to lack of a well-planned action, corruption and misplaced priorities.

Besides, the menace of quackery was rampant in society, and healthcare commissions were nothing but ineffective, toothless bodies, the PMA leaders said.

Citing the national data according to which 55pc of Pakistani population consists of people less than 30 years of age, the speakers at the press conference said it was surprising that there was no career planning for this section of society.

"We do not have enough educational institutions to give them quality education or vocational training. Hence, this massive chunk of population at the peak of its physical and mental prowess is not involved in

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PAKISTAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Scientist who edited genes says he acted 'too quickly'

Geneticist He Jiankui stops short of apologizing for procedure that shocked the world of science in 2018.

THE scientist at the heart of the scandal involving the world's first gene-edited babies has said he moved "too quickly" by pressing ahead with the procedure. He Jiankui sent shock waves across the world of science when he announced in 2018 that he had edited the genes of twin girls, Lulu and Nana, before birth.

He Jiankui was subsequently sacked by his university in Shenzhen, received a three-year prison sentence, and was broadly condemned for having gone ahead with the risky, ethically contentious and medically unjustified procedure with inadequate consent from the families involved.

Speaking to the Guardian in one of his first interviews since his public re-emergence last year, He said: "I have been thinking about what I have done in the past for a long time. To summarize it up in one sentence: I did it too quickly."

However, he stopped short of expressing regret or apologizing, saying "I need more time to think about that" and "that is a complicated question".

He Jiankui declined to elaborate on what he believed ought to have been in place before proceeding with gene editing, but said he would give further details at an invited talk he is scheduled to give at the University of Oxford soon.

He studied physics in China before moving to the United States to study for a PhD at Rice University and a post-doctorate in genome sequencing at Stanford University. He returned to China in 2012 to pursue Crispr-Cas9 gene-editing research, launching a variety of biotechnology business ventures.

Gene-edited cells were already beginning to be used in clinical treatments for adults. But genetically modifying embryos was – and is – far more ethically contentious, because changes are made to every cell in the body and are passed down to subsequent generations. Some people question whether such a step could ever be medically justified.

Against this backdrop, He Jiankui dropped the bombshell at an international conference in Hong Kong four years ago by announcing that he had modified two embryos before they were placed in their mother's womb. It later emerged that a third gene-edited baby had been born.

The edit, of a gene called CCR5, targeted a pathway used by the HIV virus to enter cells, and was claimed to give the babies immunity to HIV.

Many expressed shock at the use of a

risky, untested procedure in circumstances where there was no unmet medical need. He Jiankui's unpublished data indicated concerning evidence of "off-target" effects, unwanted genetic changes that can carry a risk of heart defects, cancer and developmental problems.

He was found guilty of "illegal medical practices" and sentenced to three years in prison. He declined to say where he served the sentence or give any details of his experience.

He Jiankui claimed to have maintained contact with the twins' family, but would not say whether he was involved in their clinical follow-up or when he last saw them. "Lulu and Nana are living a normal, peaceful, undisturbed life and we should respect them," he said. "We respect patient privacy and, for me, I put the happiness of the family first and the science discovery second."

When asked about how the third child was doing, He Jiankui replied: "I am not answering this question," later adding that the child was "living a normal life living with the parents".

He Jiankui appeared intent on relaunching his career and has set up a lab in Beijing to work on affordable gene therapies for rare diseases, such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy. He claims to have secured sufficient funding through charitable donors to rent lab space, employ five scientists and begin animal studies, and says he will use his personal wealth if required to take the venture further.

He Jiankui is scheduled to give talks at a range of universities and conferences this year, including an online seminar on bioethics at the University of Kent and the talk at Oxford, hosted by an anthropologist, Dr Eben Kirksey. He Jiankui does not view the scandal as an insurmountable barrier to running clinical trials again in future.

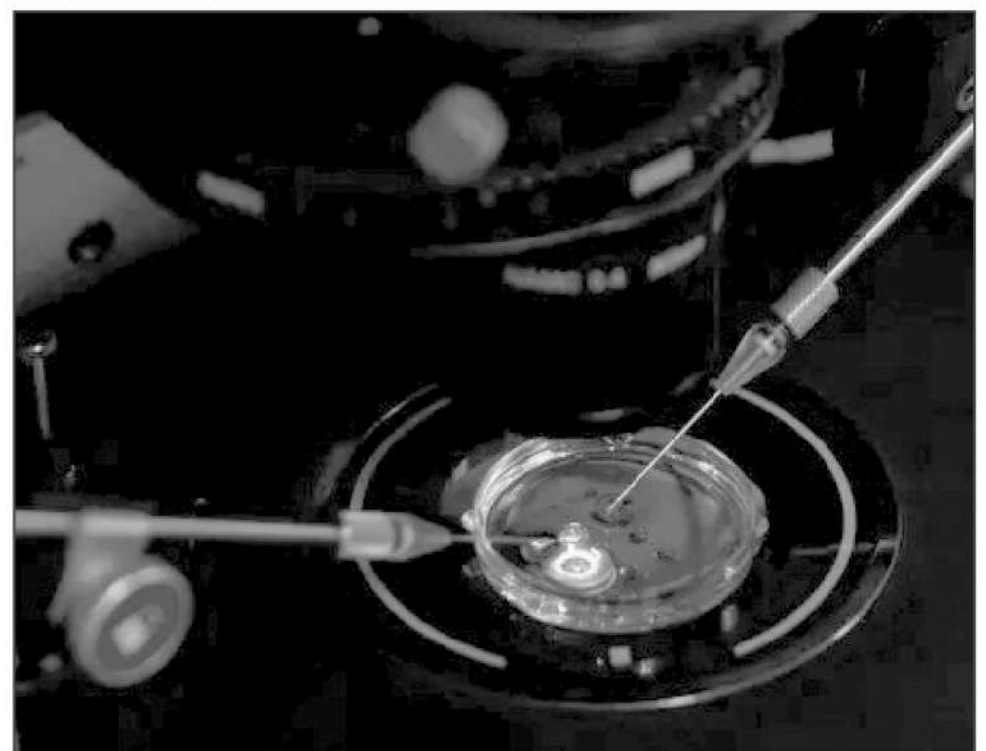
"According to Chinese law, when a person has served the prison sentence, after that they begin again with full rights," he said. "Compared to the past experience, it is more important what we are doing today that determine whether I move on or not."

Asked whether the past four years had been difficult, He Jiankui said he preferred to focus on the future. "I like the Beatles song *Let It Be*," he said. "Let us move on to my new project."

The expectation of being able to resume a scientific career in a tangential field may seem improbable, but would not be without precedent.



He Jiankui (right, above) was found guilty of 'illegal medical practices' and was jailed for three years in China. Seen below is an embryo receiving injections at a laboratory in the Chinese city of Shenzhen.



Hwang Woo-suk, a South Korean scientist, became internationally infamous in 2006 after fabricating a human cloning breakthrough and using eggs donated by his graduate students, but subsequently returned to scientific research on pig cloning and commercial

ventures cloning pets and farm animals.

He Jiankui might move on, but in his case three children will continue to carry the changes he made to their DNA, with uncertain health consequences. – *Courtesy: The Guardian*

Blobs of human brain planted in rats offer new treatment hope

BI.OBS of human brain tissue have been transplanted into the brains of rats in a study that could pave the way for new treatments for devastating brain injuries. The groundbreaking study showed that the "human brain organoids" – sesame seed-sized balls of neurons – were able to integrate into the rat brain, linking up with their blood supplies and communicating with the rat neurons.

The team behind the work suggests that eventually doctors might be able to grow blobs of brain tissue from a patient's own cells in the lab and use them to repair brain injuries caused by stroke or trauma.

"This is incredibly exciting to me as a physician," said Isaac Chen, a physician and assistant professor of neurosurgery at the University of Pennsylvania.

The study is the latest in the rapidly growing and ethically complex field of brain organoids. Scientists have shown that when cultivated in the right conditions, neurons begin to form tiny brain-like structures,

allowing scientists to investigate developmental conditions such as autism and a wide range of basic neuroscience questions.

The new work is the first demonstration that the lab-grown brain tissue can be successfully implanted into an injury site to repair an adult brain, suggesting there could be future clinical applications.

Chen and colleagues grew human brain organoids in a dish until they were about 1.5mm in diameter. The balls of tissue were then transplanted into the brains of adult rats that had sustained injuries to their visual cortex. Within three months, the grafted organoids had integrated with their host's brain, hooking up with the blood supply, expanding to several times the initial volume and sending out projections that linked up with the rat's neurons, according to the study published in *Cell Stem Cell*.

"We were not expecting to see this degree of functional integration so early," says Chen. "This suggests that neural tissue

transplantation in the adult mammalian brain, especially one that has been disrupted with some sort of injury, really is a viable path forward for neural repair."

The scientists did not assess whether the implants improved how well the rats were able to function, but tests showed that the human neurons fired off electrical signals when the rats were exposed to flashing lights. Chen said that this supported the idea that organoids could act as "blank processing units" that the brain could absorb and use to rebuild itself after injury.

"By rationally introducing these engineered processing units to specific areas of the injured brain, we think that the increased computational capacity of those areas would result in sufficient restoration of brain networks to restore neurological function," said Chen.

In theory, personalized brain organoids could be created in the lab from a patient's own cells, although Chen predicted that

clinical applications would be at least five to 10 years away. "We are at the very beginning of this journey," he said.

Dr Serena Barral, a lecturer in developmental neuroscience at UCL, who was not involved in the work, described it as an "incredible" demonstration of the sheer adaptability of neurons. "There is a lot of information that is in the DNA itself and that allows the neurons to work wherever they are – whether they are in a plastic box in the lab or in the brain," she said.

She added that in future clinical applications, the degree to which the brain could be repaired was likely to depend on which functions had been lost.

"The visual cortex is more simple, but if you think about replacing the areas that are important for speech, mathematical calculations, thinking – that could be a little bit trickier because there are a lot of abilities of the brain that are grown with experience," she said. – *Courtesy: The Guardian*

Healthcare system is on the slide, warns PMA

Continued from Page 1

any productive activity," said Dr Vasdev.

At the press conference, the PMA leaders presented a series of demands and recommendations that are part of its latest Health of the Nation report. These included the following:

- * The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) should be fully reinstated as an autonomous, democratic, transparent and vibrant body comprising elected and nominated members as per the 1962 Ordinance, with due representation of stakeholders, like PMA, PDA and Civil Society.

- * Complete overhauling of Medical Education and Training of doctors according to recent trends in the world.

- * A people-friendly National Health Policy based on the ground realities of the country.

- * Adequate health budgets with due mechanism to ensure that the allocated amount is spent professionally and sincerely.

- * Check the mushroom growth of medical colleges and universities in terms of faculty, infrastructure and tuition fee etc.

- * Mandatory vaccination and immunization for the whole nation.

- * Improve the performances of Health Care Commissions (HCCs) in different provinces. There are reports of harassment of doctors and at times extortions. There should be authoritative scrutiny of all such



- cases to make HCC an institution that is friendly to both the patients and the doctors.

- * Effective campaign for elimination of quackery.

- * Campaign against spurious and substandard drugs.

- * Prices of essential medicines should be within the reach of common men.

- * Clean water and sanitation for every citizen.

- * Campaign against adulterated foods.

- * Ensure better nutrition of children and expecting mothers for a healthy and

intelligent future generation.

- * Place total ban on sale and consumption of Gutka, Chalia, Naswar, Manpuri and all other types of tobacco usage. Implement the Prohibition of Smoking Ordinance 2002, which says no smoking at public places.

- * Awareness campaign against junk food, particularly for children as such food items are more hazardous than nutritious.

- * Establish virology labs at least in all provincial capitals so that viral diseases, like Swine Flu, Dengue, Bird Flu, Chikungunya, Zika virus, Congo virus, coronavirus and other viruses, may be diagnosed promptly. This is essential because, like the burden of bacterial diseases, the burden of viral diseases is also increasing in Pakistan, but the country has only one virology lab.

- * There should be a proper and functional sewerage system to minimize the country's environmental issues. Hospitals and factories should properly dispose of their waste to prevent environmental pollution and serious health issues. Proper areas should be allocated for waste dumping. Untreated water should not be allowed to flow into oceans, rivers and lakes to avoid pollution to save both marine and human life. More trees should be planted and forests must be conserved. Cutting of trees should be stopped to prevent air pollution, noise pollution, global warming. Forestation should be increased in cities that are overcrowded to prevent environmental pollution. The relevant environmental laws should be implemented strictly in letter and in spirit.

- * Prevention is better than cure, and this should be the basic direction of all health-related initiative and policies. It should be the national goal. The national print and electronic media must allocate some time for creating awareness on the issue.

If these recommendations are not converted into policy actions forthwith, the PMA warned, the situation will continue to get worse. The recent floods and the consequent healthcare issues should be enough to open the eyes of the policymakers, they said.

Massive swathes of Pakistan had become a watery mass grave. One of the statistics with the most far-reaching consequences is that nearly 900 health facilities were damaged; 180 of them completely destroyed. Not surprisingly, with stagnant water everywhere

preventing people from observing even a modicum of hygiene practices, stomach ailments as well as skin infections became rampant.

The health infrastructure is already not up to par in many urban centers of Pakistan, and rural areas in general have been extremely underserved. Some parts of Sindh and Balochistan have seen inadequate investment even in primary healthcare facilities that are properly staffed and accessible to the local population.

The inequality in the distribution of healthcare services comes to the fore most starkly when major road accidents occur on intercity highways and many of the injured die for want of timely medical attention, the PMA leaders said.

Income disparities, lack of awareness and in some cases, cultural practices have contributed to chronic medical issues among sections of the population. Pakistan has one of the highest prevalence of stunting in the world, with 38pc of children under five years of age affected; in Sindh, the number is almost 50pc. The country also has the second highest global burden of hepatitis C, with eight million of the population infected. After a lull of little over a year, polio cases have started making a comeback.

In the light of all the data that the PMA reports has gathered and presented, there is little doubt that what we need is reimagining healthcare, said the PMA leaders. Pakistan's Constitution sadly does not provide an explicit right to health. The related provisions are weak and vague.

A good starting point to reimagine healthcare is by making a constitutional amendment for right to health, as was done through the insertion of Article 25-A for right to education as part of the 18th Constitutional Amendment. All political parties should come together to agree on this and table a bill to this effect after the next election, demanded Dr Shoro.

Once the right to health is established, then the policy of universal health coverage should be implemented with full force. Ensured sustainable provision of priority health services at the district level can take care of the majority of healthcare needs of the population. The solution to the national healthcare problem lies in strengthening primary healthcare across the board regardless of one's financial capacity.

All these issues demand serious and appropriate reforms, concluded the PMA leaders.

ATTENTION PMA BRANCHES

**All affiliated branches and office-bearers of
Pakistan Medical Association,
which is the sole representative of the community of
medical practitioners in the country,
are hereby requested to refrain from giving credence /
approval / sponsorship to various commercial ventures
that are brought to them by any commercial organization.**

**All PMA members are further requested to strictly
adhere to the set out principled stand based on ethics
which will give a uniform impression to the general
public regarding PMA's policy in this regard.**

Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Shoro

Secretary-General

PMA Center

PMA House

Sir Aga Khan III Road

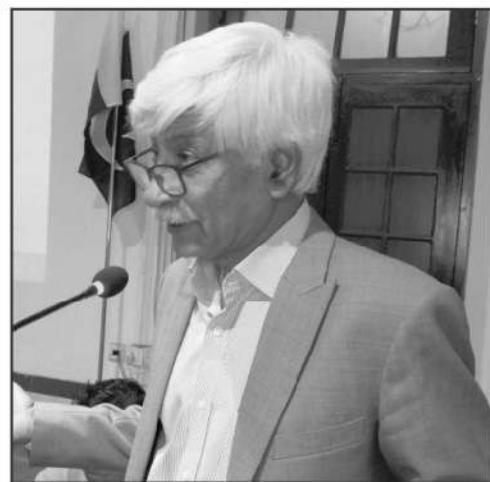
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Leading members of the medical fraternity gathered at the PMA House in Karachi recently to celebrate the lives of Dr Sadiqua Jaffery and Dr Naem Oan Jaffery at an event to launch the book titled, 'Gul; Mohar: A Biography of Two Honest Doctors'. The book, penned by Dr Shershah Syed, has captured the two lives in detail and has included the perceptions of a number of peers and juniors who came into contact with the two doctors. The ceremony was widely attended and speakers shed light on the professional commitment shown by the couple in all spheres of their lives.



PMA moves to address malnutrition challenge

GAZETTE MATTER

THE Secretary General of Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) Center, Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Shoro recently reminded all concerned that malnutrition challenges in the country were getting more and more serious, and needed all the relevant stakeholders to join hands in order to overcome such challenges.

Dr Shoro was talking to media after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Nutrition International (NI) to work jointly and to support each other in efforts and interventions aimed at improving health and nutrition status of the people of Pakistan, especially focussing on maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition.

The MoU signing ceremony was held at local hotel in Karachi. Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro signed the document representing PMA Center, while Dr Shabina Raza, Country Director, signed it on behalf of Nutrition International-Pakistan.

Senior officials of both organizations along with Ms Zeina Sifri and Ms Silvia Lin from Bill & Melinda



Gates Foundation were also present on the occasion.

The primary purpose of the MoU is to mutually engage and leverage platforms as well as human and technical resources for advancing the cause of nutrition. Both organizations will make efforts to achieve the goals of this partnership through specific focus on

health and nutrition policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks of the federal government.

This collaboration will focus on promoting nutrition through awareness raising, sensitization and capacity building as envisaged and prioritized at national and provincial levels and is evident through relevant

policy/strategy documents.

The collaboration will advocate for greater political and social commitment for maternal newborn, child adolescent health and nutrition in Pakistan. It will conduct advocacy for nutrition agenda with the healthcare community, nutrition-sensitive sectors, the private sector and opinion

leaders to build an enabling policy and implementation environment.

Health and nutrition related studies will also be conducted within program priorities and develop evidence-based recommendations for improving health system. National and sub-national events on different health and nutrition related topics for

policymakers and decision-makers, implementers and health practitioners and communities will also be organized.

PMA will support NI in the implementation of nutrition awareness and promotion programs on maternal newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition at national, provincial and district levels.

Spike in cases of dog-bite worries PMA

GAZETTE MATTER

A STATEMENT issued by Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) Center expressed its deep concern over the increasing population of stray dogs in Sindh where, as the provincial assembly was recently told, over 200,000 dog-bite cases had been reported during the last months.

The situation is seriously alarming, the statement said, adding that PMA has been vocal on the issue and it has always been its unambiguous stance that stray dogs should be culled because

Sindh of all the provinces has the highest number of stray dogs, causing an exponential rise in dog-bite and rabies cases.

The Sindh government has repeatedly announced plans to undertake a mass vaccination campaign instead of mass culling to control the stray population, but nothing has been done to date and people are left to face this dreadful threat on their own.

The PMA statement asked the government to act promptly to protect the lives of people.

PMA again warns of drug shortages

GAZETTE MATTER

PAKISTAN Medical Association (PMA) Center Secretary-General Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro has warned that the country's health delivery system is already in a shambles and a shortage of medicines due to the non-opening of letters of credit (LCs) for the import of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), or raw materials, will force the situation to take a turn for the worse.

The central leader of the representative body of medical practitioners in the country expressed concern over the statement of the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PPMA) that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) had verbally conveyed to all local banks not to open LCs due to shortage of dollars.

"If LCs are not opened soon, it may result in medicine shortages because most of the pharmaceutical companies have only two months' raw material available with them and they are unable to place orders for the raw material for further manufacturing," the PMA Secretary-General said in a statement.

"If suitable measures are not taken to avoid shortage of medicine in the coming days, the emerging situation will encourage hoarding, black marketing and smuggling of medicines, eventually

taking the prices of the medicine beyond the reach of the common man," he said.

The PMA leader asked the government take appropriate measures immediately to avoid any ugly situation and save the lives of the people.

Meanwhile in Lahore, a meeting of PMA Lahore also took notice of the alarming situation emerging in the open market regarding availability of medicines. The meeting was chaired by PMA Lahore President Dr Ashraf Nizami, and was attended, among others, by Prof Dr Malik Shahid Shaukat, Prof Dr Khalid Mehmood Khan, Dr Irum Shahzai, Dr Wajid Ali, Dr Bushra Haq and Dr Riaz Zulqarnain Aslam.

The participants were of the unanimous opinion that the government and its relevant institutions should immediately address the economic problems, specifically those related to the import of pharmaceutical raw material and other health-related items, to help doctors save the lives of their patients.

A joint statement After issued after the meeting asked the government to avoid any kind of consultation with negative tendencies in the supply of health and lifesaving drugs and medical equipment. Instead, it should initiate a process of consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including individuals and organizations, to make a humane, patient-friendly and actionable plan.

PMA slams attack on polio targets

GAZETTE MATTER

THE senior leadership of Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) Center strongly condemned the brutal suicide attack on a truck carrying police workers for the security of polio workers who were administering vaccines during a campaign in Kuchlak and other areas of Quetta district, claiming four innocent lives, and leaving 23 others injured.

"The polio workers and policemen serving the nation in polio campaigns courageously, even after these ruthless attacks, are our real heroes who are serving the nation at the cost of their lives to make our country polio-free," said a PMA statement.

"These vicious attacks over the innocent people are not acceptable. We demand the federal government and the provincial government of Balochistan to enhance security measures for polio campaigns to save the lives of polio workers and police constables," the statement concluded.



A ceremony was held at the PMA House in Karachi to launch 'Bad-Haali Se Khush-Haali Tak', which is the Urdu translated version of a book by Syed Hassan Javed, a former ambassador of Pakistan who served two stints in China. The book draws parallels between China and Pakistan and aims at drawing certain lessons that the latter needs to learn from the progress made by China and its people over the decades. The ceremony was attended by doctors, intellectuals and book-lovers from various walks of life.



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1. Efficacy and tolerability of conversion to monotherapy with lamotrigine compared with valproate and carbamazepine in patients with epilepsy. Fikkyury et al. Epilepsy & Behavior 3 (2004) 512-518.
2. Effect of Antiepileptic Drugs on Bodyweight: Overview and Clinical Implications for the Treatment of Epilepsy. CNS Drugs 2003; 17 (1): 1.
3. Improved mood states with lamotrigine in patients with epilepsy. Cramer et al. Epilepsy & Behavior 23(4): 5, 732-707.
4. Effects of lamotrigine on nocturnal sleep, daytime somnolence and cognitive functions in focal epilepsy. Acta Neurologica Scandinavica 2002; 102: 81-86.

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PMA Center, Lahore advise govt to take new COVID variant seriously

GAZETTE MATTER

THE Central leadership of Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) has conveyed to the government that it was seriously concerned over the spread of two new COVID variants, Gryphon (Omicron XBB) and BF.7, the sub-lineage of the Omicron variant in China, India, Bangladesh, Japan, the United States, Australia and Denmark.

"Although COVID situation in the country is under control and positivity ratio is 0.5 percent, the detection of new variants in some neighboring countries makes it critical for the country to be on its guard. We should be more vigilant and take all the required preventive measures to avoid the spread of new variants in the country," PMA Center Secretary-General Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro said in a recent statement.

PMA Center advised the government to implement strict preventive measures at airports and all other border entry points. There should be mandatory COVID vaccination for international as well as domestic travel. Passengers with symptoms should be isolated and their PCR tests should be carried out, said Dr Shoro.

In Lahore, meanwhile, a statement released after a meeting at the PMA House, Prof Ashraf Nizami, the President of the local PMA chapter, also asked the government to take precautionary steps against the new COVID variants as the infection rate in China had touched the 90 percent mark.

In view of the fact that there is frequent travelling between China and Pakistan, there is an urgent need to start scanning and testing passengers at all international airports in the country.

The PMA Lahore meeting was attended, among others, by Dr

Malik Shahid Shaukat, Dr Khalid Mahmood Khan, Dr Irum Shahzadi, Dr Wajid Ali, Dr Bushra Haq and Dr Zulqarnain Aslam.

The participants also stressed the need for making PCR testing easy and affordable within the country, and for focusing on spreading mass awareness through public service campaigns related to the new COVID variant. "It is only by following the relevant COVID SOPs, like wearing of masks at all public places, can the country hope to keep another wave at bay," the PMA Lahore meeting said.

In his statement, released from the PMA Center secretariat in Karachi, Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro advised the general public to be prepared and even at this early stage follow the designated COVID SOPs.

Outlining the SOPs, he reminded everyone to wear mask whenever going out, wash or

sanitize hands at regular intervals, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with one's hands. Keep social distance and avoid large gatherings. Avoid shaking hand or hugging. Avoid sneezing and coughing openly. Instead, use the arm rather than the hands for covering up during cough and sneeze. Do not share items of personal use, like glass, plate, cup, towel, mobile, pen etc.," he added.

The PMA official said people who are not vaccinated should immediately get vaccinated and get a booster dose after six months of the second dose to improved one's chance of protection against the new variants and sub-variants of COVID.

Dr Shoro also pointed out that a huge number of false negative cases of the new COVID variant are also being reported, so any person showing symptoms similar to the virus should be isolated and

tested on PCR for confirmation.

He added that there should mandatory administration of booster doses to people who got inoculated six months ago, especially those above the age of 65 years.

The establishment of isolation centers for positive cases and those with symptoms but showing negative tests should also be actively considered. Such people must undergo chest X-rays as a part of pneumonia investigation, concluded Dr Shoro.

Meanwhile, a case of BF.7 COVID variant was recently detected in Karachi. The sample was tested at the Dow University of Health Sciences (DUHS). According to Health Department officials, the first case of the highly infectious variant in the country was detected in a 49-year-old male patient.

The officials said despite BF-

7's immune-evasive characteristics and the worrying signs about its growth in China the variant seems to remain fairly steady elsewhere.

For example, in the US, it was estimated to account for 5.7 percent of infections up to Dec 10, 2022, down from 6.6pc a week earlier. The Chinese situation and BF.7's high reproduction rate might be partly due to a low level of immunity in China from the previous infection and possibly vaccination.

According to the latest data, BF.7 is quicker to transmit than other variants. It has a shorter incubation period with a greater capacity to infect people who have previously been infected with COVID or even vaccinated.

It may be recalled that earlier, the provincial Health Department had confirmed the presence of XBB and XBB-1 sub-variants of the Omicron variant in Karachi.



PMA Lahore flays colonial mindset in health sector

GAZETTE MATTER

THE bureaucrats should avoid sabotaging treatment facilities in government hospitals by abusing their authority and harassing doctors. A PMA Lahore statement said that the untimely rush by Primary and Secondary Health Department and the issuance of a Central Duty Roster to hide its departmental incompetence is a failed attempt to worsen the already rusty treatment facilities.

The meeting asked the provincial chief executive to ask the bureaucracy to immediately settle policy issues with local officials and PMA representatives rather than behaving like colonial masters with a biased mindset.

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