
Healthcare Heroes

Our guardian angels in times of crisis



Janvikas honours the efforts of Fellow Citizens from Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad during the COVID-19 pandemic

JANVIKAS

A QUEST FOR 'JUST' HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**C/105-106, Royal Chinmay, Off. Judges Bungalow Road, Bodakdev, Vastrapur,
Ahmedabad, Gujarat 380054**

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Foreword

by Dr. Dileep Mavalankar

I am very delighted that Janvikas has documented the stories of key doctors, nurses and other staff who dedicated their efforts to save lives during Covid pandemic. This pandemic was unprecedented in living memory. Not only the public but the whole medical fraternity was also afraid of the risk of getting the disease. In spite of this these professionals and others served the sick with great dedication without thinking of the risk to themselves and their families. They are the real heroes of modern India. The county, state and all people should salute them. Many of them got the Covid disease themselves and some may have also passed away. All our sympathies are with the families of such health workers.

As a public health expert I feel this booklet prepared by Janvikas will really increase the motivation of such Covid warriors and also motivate young medical and paramedical students and professionals to perform such duties in future. I hope the government and civil society will remember their contribution and give them due recognition and reward.

With Best Wishes,

Dr. Dileep Mavalankar

Director

Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar

Message

from Mr. Gagan Sethi

Janvikas has a mandate to engage in disasters and follows the 3"S" motto i.e. SPEED SENSITIVITY & SELF RESPECT.

This Pandemic unlike the Earthquake or Tsunami where medical emergency is only one part of the tragedy, this time the pandemic is first a health emergency and other issues are consequences of how the administration handles the consequence management.

Thus while the Lockdown was a preventive measure, the major brunt of dealing with this humongous tragedy was of the medical fraternity starting from the Ambulance Drivers to the ward boys, nursing staff upwards to the Doctors and Hospital Administrators.

Thus knowing firsthand what grit, resilience and imagination and creativity it takes to respond to disasters, Janvikas is more than duty bound to honor the invisible and indomitable spirit of the Medical fraternity.

Thus it gives me immense pleasure to offer this document for posterity, the stories of the front line medical professionals.

Through these stories It is to respectfully express our gratitude as Civil Society to just not those who are mentioned but to honor the countless unnamed 24X7 women and men in white .

With Best Wishes.

Gagan Sethi
Chairperson
Janvikas

Message

from Dr. Satadal Saha

Health inequity between urban and rural population is a major problem in India. The recent pandemic exposed the fatal fault lines further in the areas of primary healthcare and public health systems in rural areas. Given the shortage of doctors and other health workers, technology limitations in rural environment and infrastructure deficits, it will not be possible to address the health inequities within the framework of conventional thinking and policies. This, in essence, is the basis of collaboration between Janvikas and JSV Innovations.

This collaboration will focus on developing a rural workforce as Community Health Workers who would be formally trained and certified in line with highest national standards. The workforce will then be empowered with innovative, frugal digital technologies (both software systems and diagnostic devices) and be backed by a team of doctors at 'remote' locations (read, anywhere). This eco-system will deliver affordable primary healthcare to the disadvantaged rural communities and spread health education and awareness. Such a community-owned and community-operated model will be able to penetrate deep and wide and garner people's trust in a short time-frame.

There is simultaneous participation of elevated seats of learning such as IIPH, Gandhinagar; IITs (Kharagpur, Guwahati) who will enrich the knowledge and science and continuously strive to improve the system of delivery and monitor its results.

We believe, with a leading role from Janvikas Trust, this would evolve as a scalable and replicable model across multiple geographies and help address one of the biggest global challenges that face the world – access to healthcare. This is also in line with the stated policy of the union government in promoting digital healthcare in our country.

With Best Wishes.

Dr. Satadal Saha, MS, FRCS (Eng.)
Project Director, Dr B C Roy Super-speciality Hospital, IIT Kharagpur
Founder & Mentor, JSV Innovations Private Limited
Visiting Professor, School of Medical Science & Technology, IIT Kharagpur

Shivani Parmar

Nurse, Isolation Ward

Age: 26 years

“When I recovered from the Coronavirus, I went back to work in the same ward where I was admitted. I enjoyed talking to patients and counselling them. I would tell them that I was on this same bed as a patient and they can also overcome this, like I did.”



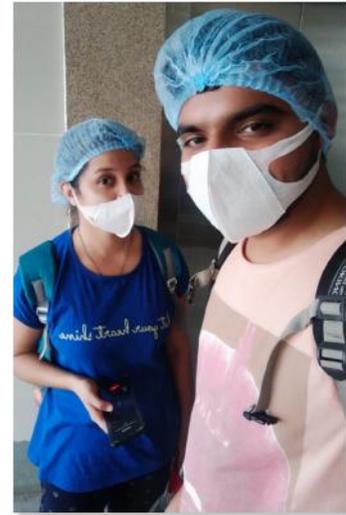
Overnight, Shivani Parmar went from being a nurse to a patient at Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital. She was one of the first staff to test positive for the Coronavirus. Not knowing whether she had infected anyone else in her family, she felt lost thinking about how she got exposed despite following all precautions for personal hygiene at work. The next day her husband also tested positive and was admitted. She recalls being devastated. Media coverage had made her afraid of her chances of coming out of this. After 2 or 3 days, she felt better thanks to the



nurses on duty, who helped and took care of her. During her stay at the hospital, she realised this experience would help her guide and advise patients. A month later when called back to work, she re-joined COVID-19 duties without hesitating.

The isolation ward was familiar to Mrs. Parmar but she was worried about her husband’s phobia of hospitals. Due to the level of care they received, he did not complain about anything over the 8 days they were there. The couple practiced keeping a distance and used to talk on the phone, despite being in front of each other. The 12-bedded area they were in had other staff members who were recovering. “Yesterday even I was crying but today I feel better. We are all in this together”,

Shivani remembers advising another young nurse who had just been admitted. They all shared their stories and supported each other, which created a sense of belonging while they were away from their families.



Apart from tasks like preparing care charts, coordinating treatments with doctors, and giving patients sponge baths, Mrs. Parmar considers it her duty to communicate with and support patients like a family member. This is what they need the most. She says, “Many elderly patients don’t even have smartphones so how can they communicate with their family? Some get depressed, stressed and panicked because their relatives are not around.” She believes that while people should be cautious about the conditions in which Coronavirus spreads, they should not cut-off completely from each other.

As a caregiver, the support she wants in return from society is non-discrimination between common citizens and healthcare workers. She wants people to see doctors, nurses, technicians and paramedical staff as normal human beings with social needs. Her colleagues have shared stories of neighbours closing doors and cutting ties with them and their families. Some have been asked to sanitise their vehicles, quit their job and vacate rented apartments. Such stigmatisation has an adverse affect on their wellbeing. When asked about her hope for society after the pandemic she says, “Corona is not over yet. We need your support now more than ever so that we don’t miss our families and suffer less psychologically.”

Breaking down into tears she says, “My village is 200 kilometres away. I haven’t met my mom in 5 months even though she has her own health issues like thyroid and high blood pressure. We both act strong for each other. She tells me to take care of myself and not to worry about her. I never cry on the phone but I really want to see her.” This is not her problem alone. Some of Shivani’s colleagues haven’t met their young children for 3-4 months. “People can’t live without their mothers. Look at me. I’m married and I’m crying like this. Imagine what they are going through being separated from their small children.” We salute all the medical professionals, like Nurse Parmar, who are risking their physical and mental well-being for the common good.



Vishnu Prajapati

Head Nurse, Paediatrics Operation Theatre

Age: 56 years

“I used to get very emotional explaining to my 3 year old grandson why he could not come near me. I didn’t want to cry in front of him so I would go to the bathroom.”



The first thing Vishnu Prajapati did when India’s nationwide lockdown was lifted was take his grandson for a drive. Apart from being a doting grandfather, he is the head nurse of the Paediatrics Operation Theatre at Civil Hospital where he has worked for the last 20 years. He was posted in the Intensive Care Unit when he tested positive for the Coronavirus. Having seen firsthand how being separated from their family adversely affects patients, he decided not to get admitted in the hospital. Although he was very unwell, Mr. Prajapati’s experience with patients helped him liaison with a doctor to manage his own treatment at home.

A rope was tied across the entrance of the room in which he was quarantined. His grandson used to sit outside and call out, asking to meet him. Mr. Prajapati recalls how emotionally distressing this was - “I tried explaining that he needs to wait for 15 days. He used to tell me if I don’t come out, he will come in. We’re used to having dinner together as a family so on some days he wanted to eat in my room. At times he would act stubborn, saying he would not eat at all if I didn’t let him sit with me. He used to count down the days until I could leave my room. When the day came, we sanitize



everything thoroughly. He was woken up and told that his grandpa was waiting to meet him. I can't describe how I felt in that moment when he came downstairs and hugged me.”

During the first few days of his illness, Mr. Prajapati was afraid and had given up hope. He is diabetic and thought his health would deteriorate quickly due to this comorbidity. A nurse with the same underlying condition had recently been diagnosed and died. This fear, compounded by a high fever, was getting to be too much for him. His wife, who is also a head nurse at Civil Hospital, kept a watchful eye on whether he was eating, drinking and taking his medicines on time. She gave him solace and a sense of confidence that he would recover. Their combined experience in this field helped them control the infection and ensure that it was not transmitted to others at home.

Mr. Prajapati's son and daughter-in-law have been an immense support, which is the reason that both he and his wife have been able to work throughout the pandemic. His friends called every hour, from morning to night. Colleagues checked up on his health multiple times a day. Every morning neighbours left milk, fruits and vegetables outside his apartment anonymously. Sharing what he learned from this difficult time he says, “If you give in to the fear, you give in to the virus and will not recover fast. It takes a toll on your mental as well as your physical health.” From his interactions with patients, he knew the importance of staying mentally strong, which he was able to do with the help of people around him.





However, he recognises that not all nursing staff have the same level of support. Some have felt emotionally overwhelmed and required counselling. One nurse did not feel comfortable going back home because her family was not supportive of her work. She stayed in the hostel instead, separated from her young infant. Mr. Prajapati's only hope is that we overcome the Coronavirus soon - "It has had a very negative effect on our lives and until we control it there will be many social, economic and psychological problems. I pray that our country recovers quickly." We salute you for your strength and resilience.

Jaimin Barot

Sanitary Inspector

Age: 35 years



“I performed the last rites for seven unclaimed bodies at our hospital. That is not a part of my duties but it’s a noble cause so I volunteered to do it.”

In May, a nurse at Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital found out that she and her husband were infected with the Coronavirus. Her husband’s health deteriorated and he was moved to the Intensive Care Unit, where he passed away. She too was admitted in the hospital and her son was quarantined at home with his pregnant wife. The nurse called her relatives but no one agreed to come collect the body. That’s when Mr. Jaimin Barot, who is in charge of dead body decontamination and holding, received her call.

He recalls her plea - “I want you to perform my son’s duties”. Reflecting on what was going through his mind when he received that call, he said “God called upon me using her mouth. This pandemic has changed and ruined a lot of lives. I will do whatever I can with my two hands to help such people, even if it goes beyond the limits of my job.” Jaimin video-called her during the last rites and 10 days later, personally brought the ashes to her.



Mr. Barot's family is service oriented, which has been a part of his education, values and upbringing. His father is a political leader and social worker. His brother is part of the police force. Their expectations and dedication give him the strength to work wherever there is a need. His uncle, who was also a Sanitation Inspector, helped him find a government job. Jaimin dreamed of starting a business and never expected to do the kind of work that he does. But he derives satisfaction from helping very poor patients - some of whom cannot even afford to pay for transportation from the hospital to their homes.

Mr. Barot manages the hospital's sanitation staff. His responsibilities include overseeing housekeeping, infection control, biomedical waste management and workers' safety. He has built an aptitude for being an effective and empathetic leader. When the hospital was converted into a COVID-19 dedicated centre, there were multiple obstacles. Initially, many employees were afraid and reluctant to work in the wards. After gradually sensitising them through education, training and counselling, he enlisted the first batch of 99 sanitation workers.

However, the influx of patients increased in the second week; most of the regular and ICU beds were filled by then. At this point some employees felt demotivated and were not executing their responsibilities properly. Mr. Barot stepped in and started doing the work himself. Sharing his approach, he says "Doing physically exhausting work, like cleaning, in Personal Protective Equipment is too tough. We get dehydrated and dizzy. If my team was working in PPE for 8 hours, I was doing it for 16. If I were to just supervise instead of doing the work myself, I would not have their support."

Initially, Mr. Barot supervised all three shifts personally; he was engaged throughout the day. He also started spending informal time with his team in order to understand their doubts, complaints and suggestions. He would go to eat dinner at the hostel just to understand if their needs regarding food and accommodation were being met. This built trust and a sense of unity. After the state government announced certain assurances, the class 4 employees started feeling more secure and giving their 100 percent. Between March and June, Mr. Barot enlisted close to 12,000 *karamcharis* to work in COVID-19 duties.





Due to their status in society, sanitation workers face unique challenges and hardships, which have been exasperated by the pandemic. Their job includes disinfecting and flushing toilets after they are used by patients. Without them, infection control practices would be impossible in any hospital but this does not reflect in their wages. Most live in poverty and densely populated areas, which have become containment zones. With blocked roads and no transportation available, the hospital had to organise shuttles for them, and in some cases meals.



For Mr. Barot, seeing people abandon family members in their greatest time of need has been the most difficult part of his job. Two sons, living in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, refused to collect their father's corpse when contacted. He wants the public to know that hospitals have protocols in place to prevent the spread of communicable diseases from dead bodies during the funeral. He hopes this mentality doesn't persist and also that society reconsiders the role of sanitation workers after this pandemic. He says, "They have been working humbly with the ground under their feet and should be given the same amount of respect as doctors and nurses. You are human so treat everyone with humanity." We salute you for your sense of duty towards those who are alive and deceased.

Ramesh Solanki

Public Relations Officer

Age: 34 years



“When relatives video-call their loved ones, some get very emotional. If the patient’s condition deteriorates, they get angry and blame everything on us. But I don’t let it affect or bother me. I come here in a good mood and I leave in a good mood.”

Ramesh Solanki is one of 15 Public Relations Officers (PROs) at Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital. PROs operate as helping hands, liaising between medical personnel, patients and their relatives. They are responsible for helping poor and uneducated patients access government schemes. Now they work at the dome, a structure constructed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has facilities like beds, food, water, air coolers and television sets for patients’ relatives. The team operates a help desk for relatives seeking information about the patient, including their diagnosis, treatment and duration of stay.

The team's core responsibility is building trust through customer care, coordination and communication. Every morning they create a list and facilitate video calls to connect relatives to patients admitted in the 1200 bed hospital. Detailing these conversations he says, “We sit with relatives and help them understand the patient’s condition, regardless of whether they are stable or on a ventilator. Some fight with the doctors and with us. We understand this is a stressful situation for anyone to be in so we don’t argue or get hyper. We counsel them and try to explain that their cooperation is essential for the patient’s wellbeing.” The key to keeping the relatives in confidence is reassuring them that medical decisions are made keeping their loved one’s recovery in mind.





Patients often do not meet their relatives for 15 to 20 days, but Ramesh did not see his family for 4 months. At first he wondered how he would undertake COVID-19 duties with a 2 year old daughter and elderly father at home. However, he decided to stay at the hostel to minimise the risk. Witnessing his determination to serve humanity during this time, his family realised they would not be able to convince him otherwise. Acknowledging the personal sacrifice this job requires he says, “For the last 4 months I only saw my daughter on video call. She’s 2 so she only manages to say a few words but when I finally went home, she clung onto me. She was the first person I hugged in a long time. I felt really happy.”

Ramesh’s wife is also 4 months pregnant and he hasn’t been able to accompany her for regular check-ups at another hospital. Once when he called to make an appointment, he was told they would have to find another hospital because of Coronavirus cases in their residential area. He describes this dilemma - “At that point I couldn’t help feeling disappointed. We serve the public selflessly but when it comes to our needs, people say no.” On multiple occasions, without thinking twice, Mr. Solanki has gone beyond the call of duty but that has not always been reciprocated.

He recalls one such instance involving a 72 year old patient. His daughter, who was based in Delhi, contacted him on his personal number. He answered all her calls and helped her talk to her father, even late at night when he was no longer at the hospital. Over the next 2-3 days her father’s health deteriorated and he was put on a ventilator. Soon after, he expired due to an underlying heart condition. Although he explained the patients’ entire history to the daughter, she verbally abused him and filed a complaint to the authorities. Just a few days prior to this the PRO team had received positive feedback from the same family.

Yet again, he rationalised the incident with the understanding that losing a loved one is devastating and frustrating. As someone who interacts closely with patients and their relatives, he has a message for the general public - “Our staff was also scared at the start, but we put those fears aside in the larger interest of society. Every single one of us is working extremely hard. We don’t think in terms of 8 hour shifts and do whatever is required to fulfil our responsibility. There are issues but we talk to patients regularly and sort them out.”

Mr. Solanki's role requires him to be accommodating and offer advice to relatives who are suffering, even when it spills out on him. He shares what this looks like on a daily basis - "Just this morning I made one of the relatives talk to their patient. He immediately broke down and started crying. Later, I asked him to think about how this might affect his loved one, who was already afraid due to the illness. I offer positive support and tell them to be calm, so that the patient feels secure knowing that their family and the hospital staff are working together to look after them." This is the kind of practical advice that helps patients and their relatives.

Although his job requires him to be level-headed, there are times when Ramesh cannot control his emotions on a very human level. "Yesterday we were collecting a video testimonial from one of the patient's relatives. He was happy and gave us positive feedback about the food and other facilities at the dome. Right then we got a call from inside the hospital informing us that this patient had expired. He was saying all these nice things to us and then we had to explain this to him. At that moment, we couldn't stop ourselves from crying."

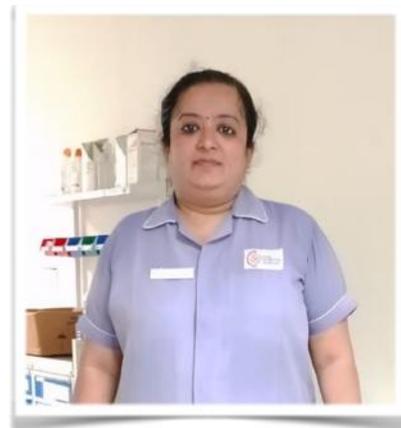
Reflecting on what he's learned by caring for patients he says, "While handing over dead bodies, we go with the relatives regardless of the patient's caste or religion. That's when I understood that having family by your side is the only important thing in this world. Nothing else matters as much." Although he deals with difficulties on a day to day basis, he doesn't let them weigh him down personally or professionally. We salute you for your patience and positive outlook.



Yamini Sutariya

Infection Control Nurse

Age: 36 years



“When I recovered from the Coronavirus, I went back to work in the same ward where I was admitted. I enjoyed talking to patients and counselling them. I would tell them that I was on this same bed as a patient and they can also overcome this, like I did.”

As an infant, Yamini Sutariya had difficulty breathing. Her parents thought she had asthma but she was diagnosed with Tuberculosis by a family doctor at the age of 6. The infection had progressed and the prognosis was that it would be hard to save her life. The treatment available at the time was slow and only ended by the time she was 13. However, her body did not recover completely.

As a young girl, Yamini did well in school and committed herself to helping others in similar situations. After having barely survived Tuberculosis, studying medicine became her life’s goal. In her second year of nursing college she developed another lung infection. This time it was Pneumonia, which took her almost a month to recover from. In June, she was diagnosed with the Coronavirus. A CT scan revealed that her lungs were still damaged from the previous infections, even after 30 years.

As an infection control nurse at Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital, Yamini’s job involves collecting and analysing data about the spread of infection in order to control it. She creates awareness amongst her colleagues and trains them on standard safety protocols to be followed while on duty. She is also responsible for surveillance of bio-waste disposal and disinfection practices. Despite taking every precaution herself, Yamini developed a fever and dry cough.

She thought these symptoms were a result of exhaustion and started a course of antibiotics. A few days later, she started experiencing loss of appetite and her sense of smell. Although the fever subsided, her body felt weak and she experienced heavy headaches. These unwanted changes in her body were also causing her to feel depressed. At this point, she confronted the possibility of being infected.

Despite counselling and caring for patients on a daily basis, Mrs. Sutariya struggled to maintain a positive attitude. She started losing hope given her history of respiratory illnesses and was afraid of being put on a ventilator. She worried about not surviving a third infection to her lungs. Yamini remembers experiencing similar feelings when she was younger - “I know what it feels like when your lease on life is ending and you don’t know how much time you have left with family” she says.

At a young age, Yamini didn't understand the negative impact of these feelings. Now she knows that she's faced them before and has the willpower to overcome them. She reminded herself to have faith and patience. Practicing yoga, meditation and simple breathing exercises aided her recovery. She has realised the importance of slowing down and taking care of herself, even while caring for others. Although being isolated in one room was difficult, this time taught her to pay attention to her body. She hopes to continue this habit when her demanding routine resumes.

Mrs. Sutariya's colleagues have inspired her to return to her work responsibilities at the earliest. Despite being separated from their families and infants, they have displayed extraordinary dedication. Nurses on special duty look after children as if they are their own - playing with them, feeding them nutritious meals and giving them lots of attention so that they do not miss their parents. Upon returning to the hostel after duty hours, they would exchange stories and occasionally goods sent from home. Even though she missed her husband, Yamini would look forward to having meals and doing yoga together. This positive environment reminded her of life in college.

The biggest lesson Nurse Sutariya has learned is one of unity. "To fight against a situation which is not in our control, we have to become one and work in unison. We need everyone's involvement, at all levels. This built a sense of respect between us because finally everyone's work is visible", she says. There is no role too small when faced with a mammoth task that requires a high level of organisation and coordination.

This year International Nurses Day was celebrated in an unprecedented manner. "In movies nurses are shown only as assistants trailing behind doctors but in reality there's so much more we do. Usually when people recover they only thank doctors but now society knows that there are a lot of people standing behind them" - Yamini says this realisation has a lot to do with the Coronavirus. Nurses are finally getting the platform they deserve and being recognised as an integral part of the healthcare system. This keeps her going in difficult times. We salute your spirit of survival.



Dr. Rajesh Solanki

*Senior Professor,
Pulmonary Department*

Age: 61 years



“I have worked through the era of Tuberculosis, Swine Flu and now Coronavirus. So it’s impossible for fear to enter my mind. We have to work and we have to fight. That is the only way out of this.”

For many, the level of fear and anxiety associated with the Coronavirus is unprecedented. Dr. Rajesh Solanki, who heads the Pulmonary department of Civil Hospital, is characteristically calm. The pandemic has made the rest of society hyper aware of the risk infectious diseases pose to doctors’ health and safety. However, he and his colleagues have always been exposed to deadly diseases like Multiple Drug Resistant-TB and Highly Drug Resistant-TB on the job. Having worked in Ahmedabad’s largest government hospital for over 36 years, performing procedures in a high risk and stressful environment is not a novel situation.



Dr. Soni grew up in a small town and would fall ill frequently, often with malaria. The doctor who treated him as a young child inspired him to pursue a medical degree. That was a turning point in his life. Later on in his career, he became an integral part of the Tuberculosis control program

initiated by the World Health Organisation and Government of India. While speaking with international colleagues, who looked to India for solutions, he realised his calling to work for his country and its people.



The Indian Council for Medical Research and other government bodies have warned that people above the age of 60 are at the most severe risk of COVID-19. Rather than being fearful, Dr. Soni provides strength and support to his patients and team. A junior doctor who works with him says, “Having an experienced person like Solanki sir has always helped us when the Out Patient Department is overcrowded or we have an overwhelming patient response. In any panic situation we rush to him for guidance. We never feel like he is 61. He is always ready to work alongside us.”



Another colleague describes his leadership style as caring and kind. “Even at this age, he is the person on our team who has spent the most time in COVID areas since February. He maintains the same level of energy throughout the day, which is not possible for even younger people like us.” His interest towards infectious diseases and sheer zeal to treat the community make this an easy task for him. When confronted with death and difficult situations, Dr. Solanki stays hopeful by remembering the medical ethics he was taught and the oath that he took. He operates with the belief that every life is important - “Saving even one patient is good work. That single life means everything to their family. You should not give up or believe that you cannot do anything for them. You have to try harder and harder.”



Dr. Solanki takes a personal interest in patients and spends time counselling relatives even in emergency situations. He believes the doctor-patient relationship is important in the mental and the medical fight against Coronavirus. One day a man entered the hospital with his mother, who was on her last breath. Even amidst the panic, he allayed their fears by explaining the level of care she would be receiving. In another instance, two young boys whose parents were admitted in the COVID-19 wards didn't have anyone to look after them. Dr. Solanki suggested staying at a shelter, where they would be provided food and accommodation. He is passing on an important lesson to his younger colleagues - that there is more to caring for patients than just the clinical treatment. We salute you for your humanitarian approach to medicine.

Dr. Chirag Patel

Head of Emergency Department

Age: 48 years

“In the Emergency Room, we see the importance of two things - oxygen and teamwork”



Trauma centres are the first line of defence where stabilising and life-saving procedures are performed on patients. "We are used to medical and surgical emergencies but the Coronavirus pandemic has been a completely different experience in my lifetime" says Dr. Chiraj Patel, who heads the Emergency Department in Ahmedabad's Civil Hospital. Majority of the patients they attended to during the COVID-19 crisis have been severely critically ill and highly dependent on oxygen. Taking utmost care to protect healthcare workers is an additional challenge to patient management. A high viral load makes this the riskiest area in the hospital.

In a span of 3 months, 70% of all residents and faculty working in the emergency department were infected. Dr. Patel and a few others were lucky to not contract the virus, which has become part and parcel of their profession. "Despite our best efforts, my residents were turning out positive one by one. We all take due care including proper use of PPE and distancing. We also increased the number of staff on rotation with help from the authorities. It really hurt because we were doing everything to ensure we don't breach the link", he says. By the end of June, Dr. Patel also started experiencing symptoms like a high grade fever. His samples were taken for testing and he was admitted suddenly, in the triage area where he treats patients every day.

This switch in roles was confusing but he maintained faith and confidence in his colleagues. Not wanting to interfere with his treatment, he never inquired into their findings. The fever did not subside or respond to antiviral medication. When his treatment started involving steroid injections and repeat scans, he realised the infection had progressed and was no longer in a mild form. Describing these internal changes he says, "It took 10 days to win over the fever. Finally, I was feeling relaxed but then I started having difficulty breathing during normal routine movements like brushing. I've seen a lot of patients so I know that the virus takes its own time and course. Over the next 10 days my battle with low oxygen saturation started. As a doctor, I know that we are all doing our best for patients but I started worrying about whether I would make it through this journey."



Dr. Patel's message, as a medical professional and survivor, is that the public should not underestimate the Coronavirus - "Experts and researchers are not yet certain about the novel disease's development, treatment and vaccine. What's known is that this condition involves the lower respiratory tract, unlike the flu. When vital organs like the lungs and heart deteriorate, it can suddenly become catastrophic and fatal." While the disease progresses in the body, it also challenges one's strength of mind. His advice for people who are afraid and struggling with their diagnosis?" Immediately after the rain there are lots of puddles. You have to be determined and wait for the sunshine. Maintain good hydration, nutrition and do a few basic breathing exercises, because these are the things that are in your control. This is a disease you have to win step by step." With this personal experience, Dr. Patel hopes to be able to understand his patients much better clinically.

The most important lesson he learned is about the teamwork required to save a person's life - "Nothing is a single man job. Helping each other while working in the emergency room gives us real strength to manage such a mammoth task." When admitted in the hospital, he observed how small things can make a big difference to patient care. Doctors decide the right course of treatment with numerous follow ups. Nurses nurture the patients and take the utmost care to not hurt them. Paramedical staff perform tests and scans in a timely manner. Service staff are sympathetic and look after patients 'physical as well as socio emotional needs. He says, "These often unnoticed efforts by everybody strengthen the patient's overall recovery."



Dr. Patel spent 20 days in the hospital and spent most of his time reading medical research. “I’m always updating my knowledge and cleaning my inner self. These two things give me immense pleasure. I like solitude and use it as a strength to pass through tough phases. I got home two days ago but I’m still separated from my family. I am happy talking to myself and will use this time as fuel to charge again.” He looks forward to being back on the frontline with his team, many of whom returned to work with the same zeal and enthusiasm after being infected. He shares an intention while he waits out the last phase of his recovery - “There’s a calming peace in your mind when you know you’re doing the best for patients. I will continue working like a real warrior and keep my spirit high continuously. That is what all healthcare workers are doing world over and still the demand of this crisis.” We salute you for your resilience and strength.

Trusha Gurang

Patient Attendant

Age: 20 years

“One patient started crying a lot and hugged me when he got discharged from the hospital. He said he would remember me. Yesterday I got a video call from a patient who recovered and was returning to work. His family invited home when this is over.”

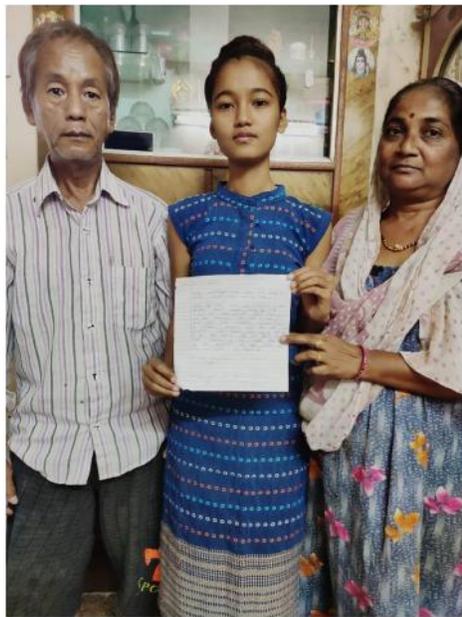


Trusha Gurang is in her 3rd year of college and pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. She has also completed a course on elderly assistance at the Indian Red Cross Society and was recruited to be a Patient Attendant at Ahmedabad's Civil Hospital during the Coronavirus pandemic. She tends to patients on oxygen support - assisting them with eating food, drinking water, sponge baths and oil massages to relieve their stress. Due to their proximity, patients and attendants form an emotional bond with each other.



Along with COVID-19 duties, Trusha also manages to attend online lectures for college. She says her job involves “anything that can give the patients a feeling of being at home”. Talking to patients on a personal level gives her strength and sense of comfort too. They share stories about their families and stay in touch, even after their recovery and return home. Staying away from her family for the first time has not been easy, although they are open-minded and support her decision. Her parents are very proud of her contribution to society. She says, “I took this on as an opportunity, not a challenge. For me this is service. I see it as something I would do for my grandparents, parents or sister.”

For many years, Trusha’s father was paralysed on the left side of his body. He needed physical assistance with daily activities like walking, eating, bathing and going to the washroom. She has grown up taking care of him. This personal experience drives her to help people who are in similar situations. It also informs her sense of what gives patients relief, like how to bathe and seat them in the most comfortable position. She comes up with new ideas everyday and shares these ways of working with her colleagues.



She recalls one patient becoming extremely fearful after seeing someone die besides him. She counselled him and started checking in with him daily. She tried explaining that his oxygen saturation levels were fine and that he had no reason to be afraid. He was still worried so she decided to personally approach the doctor in-charge and ask about the patient’s status. She shared this feedback with the patient and reassured him that he would be discharged soon. The patient thanked her for her support and started crying. She says, “Sometimes I feel like crying too but can’t because the PPE will get wet. I don’t feel like leaving the patients when my shifts are over. But when I have to, I tell them I’ll be back soon. I have their mobile numbers so I call and ask how they are doing.”

At the age of 20, Trusha is one of the youngest people working at the hospital. She addresses most patients as 'uncle 'or 'aunty 'and cares for them very closely. Some refuse to eat because they are afraid to be taken off oxygen support. This causes their health to deteriorate. Describing the positive impact of these interactions with patients she says, "Sometimes they start fighting and I have to explain things to them like I would to a child. When we give them head massages, some start crying and saying we are like daughters to them."



Trusha works at the hospital on a contract basis but is sincere about her duties while also adding joy to the work environment. "Patients in the wards get anxious and depressed so we dance and make them laugh. Doing these things gives me immense happiness and also helps patients gain strength. They start thinking they're going to make it out of this. I can tell from the way they talk and how their behaviour changes," she says. Due to the fear factor that accompanies the physical danger of Coronavirus, she considers this psychological support to be a part of her primary responsibilities.

On her birthdays, Trusha prefers spending time with the under-privileged rather than celebrating with her friends. Service is an integral part of her character and her core interest lies in social work. She has been involved with various volunteering activities in slums and villages. She has organised cancer awareness campaigns, national health camps and blood donation drives. Although she is not from the medical field, the blessings she receives from patients keep her engaged and interested in this work.



Although she was confused at the start, the hospital staff and administration have motivated and mentored her. Trusha has found sure footing and even convinced her sister and some of her peers to join her at the hospital. Some patient attendants have come from areas surrounding Ahmedabad, like Bhavnagar and Palanpur, in response to the crisis. Despite being trained permanent staff, the nurses and ward boys are impressed with the way the young attendants interact with the patients. Some have even expressed an interest in their course.

“When we wear the PPE, no one can tell if you’re a staff nurse or an attendant. Sometimes doctors address me as ‘sister’. When I tell them I’m an attendant they say my body language seems like that of a nurse! I have learned so much from everyone. I feel very supported and proud of myself. I believe in taking on every struggle as a point of learning. That way nothing is hard and we can do everything easily.” We salute you for setting a strong example of courageous and compassionate leadership at such a young age.

Dr. Rajnish Patel & Dr. Rakesh Joshi

Additional Medical Superintendents

Age: 59 years & 48 years

“We have been working in the same institute for the last 13 years but actually never knew one another. We found each other because of the pandemic. The Coronavirus has brought us closer together. That’s why we are COVID buddies.”



Dr. Rajnish Patel and Dr. Rakesh Joshi were selected for the same role, on the same day and for the same purpose – to streamline processes at Civil Hospital during the peak of the Coronavirus pandemic in Ahmedabad. Describing their leadership styles, Dr. Patel says “In Chinese literature there is yin and yang - our relationship is something like that. He connects very easily to the crowd so when the order is passed by him, the workers want to do it. When I pass the same order, they have no option but to do it. This is how we work as buddies. The person at the receiving end of the order has no way out; his heart wants to do it and his brain has to do it.” These complementary leadership styles enabled them to be adept managers and set the system straight within 2 months of working together.

As surgeons, they had to educate themselves about the Coronavirus from the microbiological to the microscopic level of the disease. Their first week on duty was spent familiarising themselves with the condition and every possible requirement. Going down to the level of managing the hospital as if they were patients themselves, they walked from the entry to exit point marking the areas that could possibly make people feel confused or uncomfortable. They created signage that would establish ease of movement, making it convenient for the patients and staff to follow rules. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, security, sanitation workers and patient attendants wore different coloured stickers to help identify them in Personal Protective Equipment.

The hospital also introduced the idea of COVID buddies – partners working together to ensure each others 'safety on duty. During the first 70 days of their appointment as Joint Additional Medical Superintendents, Dr. Patel and Dr. Joshi stayed at a hotel away from their families. Looking out for each other beyond physical protection, they formed a strong bond of emotional support. Reminiscing about shared memories, Dr. Patel says “Both of us enjoy finding wit and humour in our daily routine. We used to play around with words and coin phrases for certain instances. That’s how we kept ourselves merry throughout the day, even in the middle of serious meetings. Seeing us laugh while on Corona duty surprised many consultants but we enjoyed every

minute of it. These punchlines and puns used to make our life easier during the most difficult of days.”



This positive attitude has helped both partners face challenging situations when they were up against a wall. The capacity of the COVID-19 hospital is 1200 beds with another 15 beds in the triage area. One evening, during their daily debrief, the reported status was that 1180 of those beds were full and 20 more patients were waiting to be admitted in the triage area. The government had issued strict instructions to not refuse a single patient and the team complied. Dr. Patel and Dr. Joshi recall that night being long and nightmarish - “We don’t want to relive that experience. Each of us were waiting with our fingers crossed and praying to god not to send us any more patients. Luckily because of a change in parameters and guidelines we had some leeway to discharge patients the next day. Otherwise we would have been in a real tight spot.”

Initial months of the pandemic involved working upto 12 hours a day in a high risk environment. There was a lot of confusion and fear prevalent in society. Being a primary part of society, those myths and misbeliefs were prevalent amongst healthcare workers too. Dr. Patel and Dr. Joshi were not only an immense support for each other, but were also tasked with boosting the morale of the entire hospital staff to give the best possible treatment to patients. 15 minutes before every shift, they would target and influence the workers with the knowledge that was practically relevant at that point of time. This simple routine was effective in combating ignorance and misinformation about the disease, while also cultivating confidence and slowly removing the fear of working in a COVID-19 hospita



Things slowly started falling into place and improvements were experienced in the ease of working. The duo took daily rounds of all 40 wards and 14 ICUs; they would interact with doctors, nurses, residents and workers to ensure their needs are met. This included having medicines available on an emergency basis and making sure the PPE material was comfortable enough to work in for 8 hour long shifts. By their 2nd or 3rd rotation, doctors and nurses were comfortable doing their duties. They were feeling energetic, committed and working with increased dedication. Dr. Joshi says, "It is our emotional and motivational speeches that make the difference. We charge the healthcare workers before their duties by praising them and telling them they are doing a great job. That's why many who got infected rejoined after recovering."



On one of their rounds, Dr. Patel and Dr. Joshi saw two attendants working meticulously in tandem to feed a patient. One would remove the oxygen mask for a few seconds while the other fed him a few spoonfuls of food. This was one the most touching moments of the entire duration. “ICUs are very technical areas and this emotional component is usually missing. These girls, hardly 18 - 20 year olds, were taking their own time to feed a complete stranger with absolute love and care. Young people are very energetic and ambitious; they want to do something to support and serve the nation in this crisis. We tap into that.” Witnessing instances like this, has motivated Dr. Patel and Dr. Joshi to take on greater responsibility with enthusiasm in their work everyday. We salute you for your camaraderie and collaboration in leading this force of frontline workers!

Dr. Mukund Prabhakar

Officer on Special Duty

Age: 65 years



“We survived an earthquake and a bomb blast on our hospital. So I usually never fear what will happen to me or my family.”

Dr. M. M. Prabhakar was the longest serving Medical Superintendent of Civil Hospital Ahmedabad, and probably in the state. During his tenure he dealt with vector borne diseases such as Congo Fever and Swine Flu as well as a devastating earthquake and natural disasters like cyclones and floods. He treated victims of the Gujarat riots, Akshardham terrorist attack and bomb blast in the trauma centre of Civil Hospital itself. He retired from his post as the Additional Director of Medical Education to the Government of Gujarat after two extensions. Given this vast experience of more than 40 years in various positions, he was reinstated as Officer on Special Duty when the threat of Coronavirus loomed over the city. Despite being 65 and in the high risk category, Dr. Prabhakar accepted this demanding role wholeheartedly due to the need of the hour. By the beginning of July, more than 200 people working in the hospital had been infected. Some were put on ventilators and their prognosis was dire; 1 nurse and 3 housekeeping staff lost their lives.

Although the situation is grave and dangerous for healthcare workers, Dr. Prabhakar chose to follow his sense of duty over fear. He says, “Research bodies like the Indian Council of Medical Research and World Health Organisation have issued notices warning senior people to not step outside their houses. Still, given my past experience, I felt I should help the government control such a type of disaster. We used to admit more than 11,000 patients at a time and the severity was very high in terms of the load of patients, mortality and infectivity rates. We have been able to channelize it and at present there are only 250 patients in our COVID ward.” As the senior most medical administrator, the state made a special request for Dr. Prabhakar to come back and coordinate the hospital’s COVID response. During the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, he remembers having to discharge all patients admitted in the hospital to operate on those with injuries. His team has organised diagnostic and surgical camps where they have seen more than 25,000 patients with polio in just 3 hours. Although polio was a unique challenge for India, he says the Coronavirus pandemic is the most challenging situation he has faced owing to initial lack of knowledge about the virus’ biomechanics, genome, and unavailability of a treatment or vaccine - “These unknowns created a lot of fear in the public as well as healthcare workers. We had to protect and prepare our warriors for a fight with a different kind of enemy.” His whole team is dedicated and has immense faith in his ability to lead them in this situation. Owing to his past experience, they respect his decisions which has made the disaster easier to control.



When the pandemic started, there was only one other hospital in the city catering to Coronavirus cases. Being a private hospital, this was largely unaffordable for poor people. Reflecting on changes in the medical profession over his long career, Dr. Prabhakar says, “Previously our role in society was seen as service but there has been a deviation in the country. Now because of the corporate sector, many doctors are after money and treat their patients accordingly.” As Director of the Government Spine Institute for 25 years, he formed a patient welfare committee which provided world-class prosthetic limbs to nearly 5,000 children. Poor patients were equipped with vocational aid and training so that they could earn a livelihood after their treatment.





Dr. Prabhakar grew up in a small village with a population of only 2,500 people. He left to study in Ahmedabad in the 11th standard. After completing his medical degree and getting a government job, he dedicated himself to working for poor people. Along with his medical practice, he undertook several social welfare activities including constructing a school and a hostel in his village. When asked what gives him strength to work for others in difficult conditions he replied, “I have suffered the same poverty of people in my village. The confidence you get from coming out of such a situation gives you real strength to work for society.” A colleague who worked with him for over 25 years says, “No one else can do what Dr. Prabhakar has done for people in our village. The community sees him as god. We wonder what gift he has been given because his hands heal all.” Dr. Prabhakar is not only respected for his skills as an orthopaedic surgeon, but also for his extensive philanthropy. This makes him a rare combination, just right for his present post. We salute you for a lifetime of service.



Dr. Maitrey Gajjar

Officer on Special Duty

Age: 63 years



“This is a war. A soldier or officer who is wounded cannot withdraw himself or retreat. All our doctors are working in the same way and fighting with the same motto.”

Last year, Dr. Maitrey Gajjar transitioned from his role as the Additional Superintendent of Civil Hospital to a teaching position at B.J. Medical College in Ahmedabad. He was reinstated as an Officer on Special Duty when the hospital was converted into a dedicated COVID-19 facility. Despite being retired, he accepted this call to action from the government. After contracting and recovering from the Coronavirus, Dr. Gajjar returned to work alongside his team. He says he never feels defeated in the face of a challenge - “That is my nature. Military personnel and soldiers who have been asked to go to the border with weapons cannot retreat when they are under attack. I too am ready to get injured but I will not withdraw myself.”

This analogy is fitting because at multiple points in a day, he has to rapidly respond to incidents that require firefighting. His job is to support hospital staff at all levels by solving any problem that occurs within a short period of time. This often involves situations that are difficult to predict and control. Almost all 1200 hospital beds were full in the month of May. At that time, the Indian Council of Medical Research guidelines required even patients without symptoms to be admitted in the hospital. Relatives, who usually support doctors in addressing patients’ apprehensions, were not allowed inside the facility. Separated from their families, many patients were becoming agitated and irritable during their stay.

What followed was the most stressful scenario Mr. Gajjar has had to manage during the pandemic. More than 50 patients walked out of their wards, into the corridors and used the elevators to go downstairs. They demanded to be discharged and sent home. Even with the help of security, the chaos in the hospital was difficult to contain. Dr. Gajjar’s team made phone calls to relatives and explained the risk of infection spreading to others. After communicating with their family members, the patients calmed down and went back to their respective wards. Along with the physical exhaustion of managing medical treatments, the stress of situations like these adds to the exhaustion felt by healthcare workers.





Dr. Gajjar says, “Normally if there’s a problem we just rush into the wards or ICU, which we can’t do in this scenario. Once we wear the Personal Protective Equipment, each member of staff is indistinguishable to the patients; having to persuade them is draining and exerting.” However, the team came up with creative solutions for every obstacle that they faced. At first all queries were routed through the control room that Dr. Gajjar manages, but now there is a dedicated help-desk and dome-shaped area where relatives can check-in on the patients’ status. The hospital bought 200 mobile phones to facilitate audio and video calls between patients and their loved ones. Every department was given mobile phones to communicate easily with other teams. Faculty members guide resident doctors with treatments over the phone and patient records are sent across on various WhatsApp groups. This digitalisation helped improve processes and the workflow significantly.

The hospital also hired and placed attendants and counsellors in every ward to help people with the psychological distress of their diagnosis. Even patients who are young and physiologically healthy get extremely fearful, anxious and depressed when they learn about their diagnosis. One woman, who was 6 months pregnant, was extremely worried about herself and her child. Although her vitals and oxygen saturation levels were normal, she would enter a state of panic everyday. The female attendants and nurses visited her 3 times a day. They pacified and made her talk to her husband and mother-in-law throughout her stay. A team of social workers has been deployed to interact with patients and address everyday challenges such as this.

Dr. Gajjar became a doctor due to his interest in medicine and an inclination towards social work. He says, “We need to understand both the individual and society well. A patient's address tells us whether they live in a congested area. From their family background we can know if they live alone. By asking about friends, we understand how social they are and if they have any psychological disturbances.” Although not typically considered a part of the job, a doctor needs to

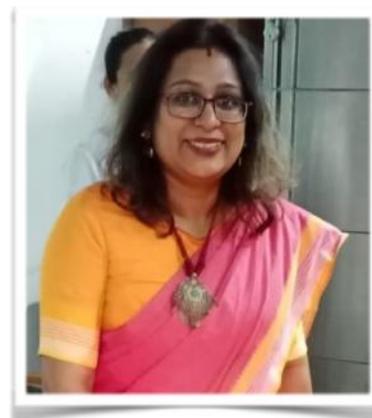
understand the disease as well as the patients psychology and surroundings to treat them perfectly; He has to have an answer to medical, social and psychological problems of a patient. In this way, Dr. Gajjar considers himself to be as much a doctor as a social worker.

Through his long career in pathology and transmission services, Dr. Gajjar has been involved in the response to epidemics and pandemics like Malaria and Swine Flu. He explains that the Coronavirus is a different kind of enemy because how it attacks the body is still unknown. However, his message for us all is reassuring - “Don’t be afraid of this disease. You are a part of society. If there’s a threat on the border, we have trust in our army. Trust your doctors and paramedics in the same way. Give them your support. If they make mistakes or are negligent, please try to explain and persuade them but be with them to deal with any situation.” At the age of 63, Dr. Gajjar contracted the virus, recovered and re-joined his colleagues in combating COVID-19. There are many in the medical community who are working like him. We salute you for continuously rising up to the challenge.

Dr. Sumeeta Soni

Associate Professor, Microbiology Department

Age: 41 years



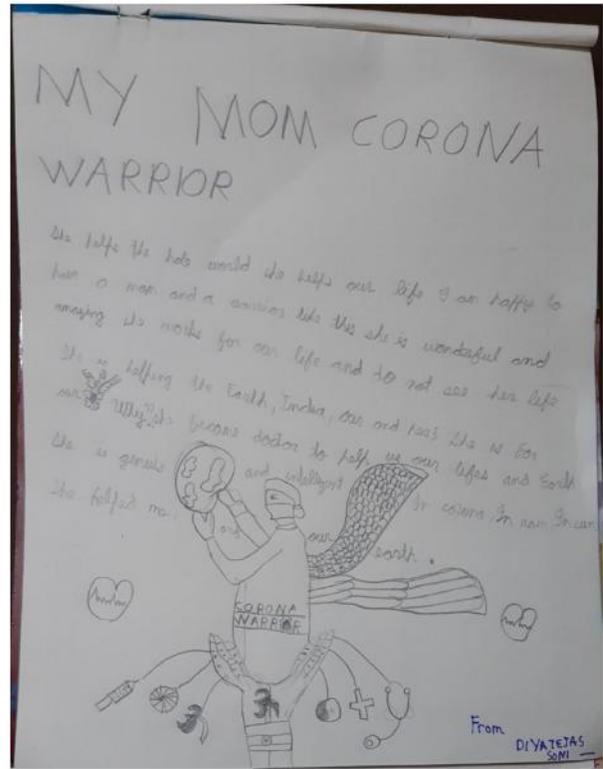
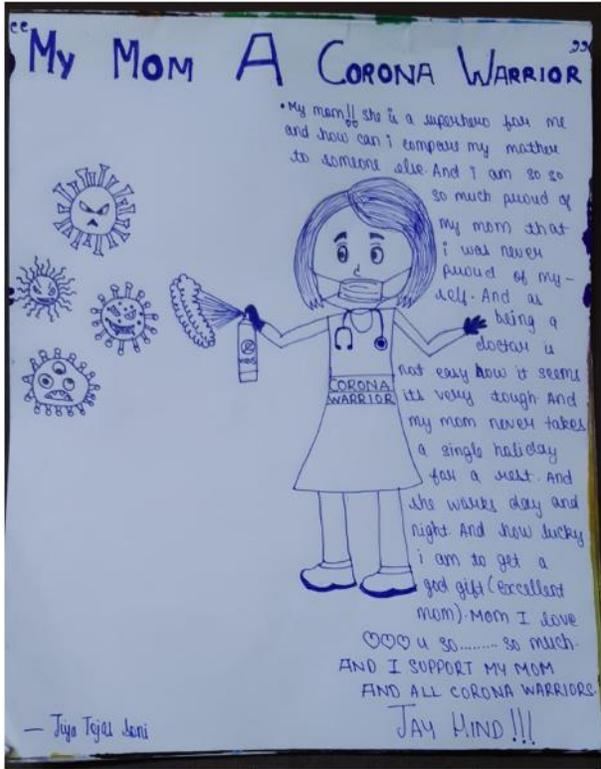
“My lab has tested more than 50,000 samples but I haven’t tested myself. There’s no point. We all already know we are exposed.”

Dr. Sumeeta Soni is usually amongst the last people to leave the laboratory. She has been working 12 to 15 hours a day since the 8th of February. “We never thought of stepping back during this time”, she says. “Every day I pray that I should not fall ill because a lot of things and people are dependent on me. I can get my sample tested in just a matter of hours but it may create panic amongst all my staff members.” She believes in setting a strong example for her team and boosting their morale.



Staff working in the laboratory are at the same level of exposure as doctors who see patients in the wards. Coming back home from the hospital is risky due to the infectivity of the disease. Dr. Soni has two young daughters who are 10 and 14 years old. Recently because her colleague tested positive for the Coronavirus, she quarantined herself in one room. Although she doesn’t get to spend time with her children, she is glad to be able to see their faces.

When an infection control nurse at their hospital tested positive, Dr. Soni had to break the news to her. She says it was challenging to initiate the conversation - “It was 5 am and I couldn’t sleep. Being a nurse on a patient’s bed raises a different set of feelings. She also has small kids like me so it was devastating.” After recovering, the nurse rejoined her duties at the hospital. She is one of the role models that Dr. Soni looks up to.



The Microbiology unit is women-led and the vast majority (up to 80%) of the lab technicians are women. 15 years ago when she was doing her post-graduate degree in the same department, Dr. Soni looked up to two of the senior staff members - these women were pioneers in setting up RT-PCR testing during the Swine Flu pandemic. This is the same kind of test which is used for the Coronavirus. “Seeing them perform the test is amazing. It’s a zero error performance”; she recalls how they used to work through the day and night then, and continue to do so in the current situation.



Dr. Soni and her team have been working 24x7 without any leave. They tested up to 50,000 samples in 4.5 months and 12,000 samples in a single day. In early February (the very initial days of the pandemic) there were only 3 centres providing diagnostic services in the entire country. One of those is run by the department of microbiology at B.J. Medical college in Ahmedabad, where Dr. Soni works. Towards the end of June, there were 9559 labs.

She considers this to be a great support by the nation. She acknowledges that although the situation is less grave than it was a few months ago, there's a long way to go - "My hope is that we, as a society, channel all our energy towards coming out of this together. If every member plays their role honestly and with integrity, we can recover as a country. Let's work together, walk together and think together." We salute you for your unwavering commitment.

Dr. Sanjay Kapadia

Resident Medical Officer

Age: 42 years



“When I found out I was being shifted to the Corona hospital, school vacations had just started. My wife and kids had gone to her relatives’ place for a few days. They are still there and I live alone.”

When the Coronavirus pandemic hit Ahmedabad, Dr. Sanjay Kapadia was put at the helm of setting up Gujarat’s largest COVID-19 dedicated hospital. Reflecting on his pre-pandemic responsibilities he says, “I was always busy. But I used to have a 9-5 schedule which also allowed me to enjoy family life. My little boy is just 3 years old. In May on his birthday, he called and asked me to come to his party. He’s really young so he doesn’t understand the requirements of my work. I also have a daughter who is 12. This is a hard situation and I miss them but we talk over video calls daily. They stay awake even if it’s as late as 11:30 pm. Their support helps me work happily.”



As a Resident Medical Officer of Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital, his duties involve planning various support services that go alongside clinical treatment. This includes managing patients’ diet and laundry, donning and doffing areas and biomedical waste. Infection control practices are central to protecting patients and staff within the premises. Having worked at the hospital for 12 years, Dr. Kapadia is well placed to look over the entire ecosystem in the most minute ways. Since the start of April, he has been working 12-14 hours a day without a single day of rest. He recalls, “In May our beds were full. One day we came in at 9 am and went home at 1 am. Soon after we got a call

from the hospital. Within half an hour me and my colleagues went back and started shifting patients. We worked through the night till 6:30 am. Talking to each other and the satisfaction of sending patients home keeps us going.” He considers working in disaster management situations, like a pandemic, to be a great service to the nation.



Dr. Kapadia joined this profession to work for those sections of society that cannot afford treatment outside of government hospitals. He says, “Every doctor has taken an oath to work for the community but this experience is different. Patients need more support due to the psychological pain, trauma and fear associated with the Coronavirus. We have managed to care for patients in such large numbers. It has strengthened the belief with which I entered this profession.”

A pandemic is a rare phenomenon and he admits that getting the infrastructure ready was a big challenge. However, he believes his entire team has taken on these issues and emerged with improvements on a day to day basis. One such creative solution is a system of seven colour-coded bed sheets to create accountability and ensure that linens get changed everyday. Each individual is given a personal care kit and 8 courses of food between 7 am and 10 pm. A chip embedded in patients’ wristbands uses Radio Frequency Identification technology to track their movements from the time of entry to exit.

Dr. Kapadia is passionate about providing better patient care and safety. The hospital covers a large area - 6km from one end to the other. Seeing all the patients in the 1200 bed facility, just by observation, would take four to five hours. Patients are shifted from ward to ward depending on their condition. Maintaining quality control and flow of patients through recovery at this scale requires attention to detail and a problem solving attitude. As a doctor and administrator, we salute you for your service to the nation.

Dr. Sanjay Solanki

Resident Medical Officer

Age: 42 years

“There have been times where I experienced upper respiratory infections, cough and body ache but continued working. If people like me give up and keep getting tested at every minor sign, it will be very difficult to run the entire show.”



Dr. Sanjay Solanki is a part of the core team in charge of converting the Woman Children and Super-Speciality Hospital into a dedicated COVID-19 centre. They have been tasked with preparing the 1200 bed facility in Civil Hospital’s campus to meet the Indian Council for Medical Research’s guidelines and global standards. His team rose to the challenge and completed this in just 5 days. Commenting on media coverage of the infrastructure in government hospitals he said, “Those who criticise the system should consider how everyone, at all levels from nurses and ward boys to the nodal officer, has been working tirelessly to meet the emerging reality.”



Dr. Solanki has not taken a single day of leave since the beginning of March, when the situation worsened in Ahmedabad. He missed celebrating his 12-year-old son’s birthday and his wedding anniversary in April. During this initial period he stayed in a hotel but decided to move back home after considering his family’s emotional needs. He takes every precaution at work and at home to protect his family, including using a separate entryway, showering immediately and disinfecting his clothes thoroughly.



Although his personal life has taken a back seat, right now his focus is singular. This reflects in his words - “When we go into the wards to treat our patients, there is nothing else on our minds. We did not join this profession out of self-interest. We feel happy that we have the chance to serve our city and country.” When asked what he misses about his life before the pandemic he responded, “We used to eat lunch with our colleagues. That’s impossible these days and sometimes we skip lunch altogether. I’ve lost 5 kgs since the pandemic started but my mental state has become as strong as ever. Our job requires giving our best, even in situations where our responsibility doubles.”

In normal times, patients’ relatives are allowed to stay in the hospital building and support doctors delivering the medical treatment. However, under these exceptional circumstances, the hospital arranged additional manpower to look after patients’ routine activities. One achievement Dr. Solanki is proud of is that his team has set up audio and video calling facilities. Every ward has been provided with mobile phones to facilitate communication between departments as well as between patients and their relatives. While his job has always been demanding, the pandemic has brought a different set of challenges for administrators. We salute your dedication as a doctor and a leader.

Dr. Bela Prajapati

Consultant, Ear Nose Throat

Age: 52 years



“It was quite scary and tense at the same time. The stress level was like finding out your own child has been infected.”

When 6 residents from Civil Hospital’s Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) department were suffering from the symptomatology of the Coronavirus, their swabs were taken by their own colleagues. Dr. Bela Prajapati recalls speaking to their relatives at odd hours and making sure they were comfortable. During the initial days, when even patients without symptoms were being tested, her department was collecting up to 800 swabs in one day. While collecting samples, residents are directly exposed to this highly infectious and deadly virus.

Wearing the Personal Protective Equipment kit for 8 continuous hours without food, liquids and bathroom breaks is exhausting. “I’m always behind the juniors reminding them to eat and take the utmost care, and to call us if there is any problem.” Dr. Prajapati feels personally responsible for residents and interns - “They are the backbone of our team.” Her daughter is also an ENT surgeon and is completing her post-graduation at another hospital in Ahmedabad. Like the young residents in her department, her daughter works for weeks at a stretch. They barely get a chance to talk and don’t see each other for 15-20 days at a time.



Dr. Prajapati joined the medical profession to become a teacher. She completed her undergraduate degree, postgraduate degree and got her first job as an assistant professor at this very hospital, where she has been working for the last 35 years. Speaking about hierarchies that usually exist amongst the medical faculty she says, “After the pandemic it feels like we are all one.” She has been responsible for setting up and managing systems, so that her team is not exhausted while performing their duties.



The hospital’s ENT department is responsible for diagnosing all patients who come in with symptoms or complaints related to the Coronavirus. In addition to playing this critical role, they also manage routine cases. In the first week of June, a 2 year-old was brought in due to severe difficulty breathing. The doctors immediately operated and removed a chicken bone from the child’s bronchus. Dealing with such emergencies during a pandemic is challenging. “Work is worship”, this is the mantra that drives her sense of duty and purpose, which is to serve society. When faced with problems, Dr. Prajapati focuses on re-centering herself. “We have to pay more attention to our lifestyle choices and look after co-morbid conditions. This is what Coronavirus has

taught us. On a personal level, I have slowed down a bit. At the hospital, I got a chance to look into every small detail and make corrections to the system. This was lost in our busy routine and the pandemic was a stop. ” In the little time she manages to carve out for herself, Dr. Prajapati enjoys dancing to free her mind from worries and regain strength. We salute you for taking care of yourself, your team and all of us.



Dr. Jayprakash Modi

Medical Superintendant

Age: 46 years

“What stands in the way, becomes the way.”

Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, Dr. Jayprakash Modi was the head of the orthopaedics department at Ahmedabad’s Civil Hospital. He did not think he would have a significant role to play in pandemic response. However, due to the dynamic nature of the disease, surgeons joined the medicine department on the frontline of this battle. At the age of 46, Dr. Modi is the youngest person to be given the honour of being appointed Medical Superintendent of the hospital. He was put in charge of the 1,200-bed Covid-19 facility as soon as it became functional.



Dr. Modi is a renowned spine surgeon who has been in the media many times for complicated spine surgeries. A surgeon of his skill level can earn 2 lakhs per surgery, yet he continued to choose working as a government employee. After completing 20 years of public service, he decided to start a private practice. However, just before his last day, he had to reexamine this new career path he had set for himself. “I wanted to leave this job and start my own practice but my life and goals changed overnight. I thought I have to give something back to the institute that gave me 20 years. Suddenly, my destiny called out to me”, he says. Dr. Modi believes obstacles guide one towards their destiny.

Although he is an excellent surgeon, Dr. Modi did not have administrative experience before the pandemic. He was, at first, reluctant to accept these responsibilities. In the very early stages of the pandemic, everyday brought with it a new challenge. From solving major management issues like developing protocols for disposing of dead bodies, to other everyday issues like sourcing food for patients during the lockdown, Dr. Modi rolled up his sleeves and streamlined processes and protocols for the hospital.



Dr. Modi learned the organisational skills required to lead an institute from his colleagues, who gave him administrative assistance and guidance. Things turned around quickly at the hospital. On April 17th 2020, his very first day, there were over 400 patients in the wards. At one point the hospital had a patient load of up to 1900 patients. This number has come down to just 200 patients. Dr. Modi says these results would not be possible without the core team’s collective efforts and support from the Gujarat Government’s top bureaucrats.

Initially, Dr. Modi considered himself to be too junior to head a premiere institute like Asia's biggest hospital. “I would call the deputy Chief Minister directly, sometimes bypassing the hierarchy of seniority that is so important in bureaucracy. Now people respect me because they know I will do whatever it takes and ask for whatever I need for patients. In managing the hospital during COVID-19, my straightforwardness and proactive nature helped.” By being direct about what needed to be done, Dr. Modi was able to face stressful situations boldly and bring them to the notice of authorities immediately. What seemed like another obstacle, turned out to be the very same attributes that make him an adept leader.



In May, Dr. Modi, his wife and two children tested positive for the Coronavirus. He felt very afraid because very little was known about the virus and treatment protocols at the time. His colleagues and friends motivated him and supported his recovery. Despite having a high-grade fever, his school friends would come to his house and take him for a walk every morning. This helped him overcome his doubts and reinforced his belief that what you give to others comes back to you. This obstacle gave Dr. Modi the motivation and clarity to not back down and continue fighting from the frontlines.

Dr. Modi's father, a veterinary doctor, had insisted that he join the medical profession. His education in a military school was centred around serving society and the nation. "My life's driving force has been to do charity. I had been considering a change in direction, towards earning money, only in the last 4 or 5 years. When I was made medical superintendent, my destiny turned around once again and I got to do what I really like, which is to help people" he says.

This is not the first time Dr. Modi has responded to the call of duty over his personal commitments. He was amongst the first responders the Gujarat Government sent to Bhuj after the devastating earthquake. At the time, there was barely any communication across the state and his family was worried about whether or not he would make it back for his own wedding. He returned to Ahmedabad on the morning of the marriage ceremony!

In the aftermath of the Bhuj earthquake, he remembers an oil nut vendor sitting outside his factory handing out his product for free. Dr. Modi was curious to know why he was doing this. The vendor told him that his factory and bungalow had fallen and there was nothing else to take along with him. "People would come to serve food to those who were affected. They would sit outside the operation theatre and make a list of all things that were needed by the doctors," he recalls. This experience taught him the importance of working selflessly at the time of natural calamities.



However, due to the fear associated with the Coronavirus, citizens have not reached out to help the hospital staff. While volunteers mobilised to help migrant workers, not many offered their services at the hospital. “The doctors, nurses and all other healthcare staff, have done a tremendous job. They are not fearful and are really working very hard. That’s why the situation has turned around” says Dr. Modi. His hope for humanity is that people should always come forward in war-like situations, rather than being fearful and retreating to a corner. We salute you for putting public service before personal gain.

