

Desensitisation of Pakistani Population to a Global Health Emergency

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Madam, Monkeypox is a zoonotic orthopoxvirus that causes disease in humans similar to smallpox, with clinically less severe symptoms and a lower mortality rate. The condition evolved when the vaccination programme for smallpox came to an abrupt halt following the eradication of smallpox.¹ In 1970 the first Human monkeypox case was reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a 9-month-old boy. Since then, many and more cases have been reported from central and west Africa². In 2003, the first outbreak outside Africa was reported in the United States of America and was linked to an infected pet prairie which was imported from Ghana. Afterwards 70 cases were reported in the USA. In Sep 2018 Monkey pox was diagnosed in travellers from Nigeria to Israel, to the UK and to Singapore. The UK cases were successively reported in Sep 2018, Dec 2019, May 2021 and May 2022.² Recently several cases of monkey pox have been reported in the non-endemic regions. Hence, with the latest trends, WHO has declared Monkey Pox a Global Public Health emergency.

Currently, no confirmed case of monkey pox has been reported in Pakistan. However, with the declaration of a global health emergency of the said virus, hence Pakistan cannot afford to miss a feeling of *Deja vu*. The catastrophic collapse of Pakistan's healthcare system during covid-19 pandemic is a lesson for us to stay vigilant as another outbreak can be more devastating especially when we are at the verge of economic collapse.³ According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), notification, national and provincial health authorities were put on high alert.⁴ However, what is more concerning is the fact that the people of Pakistan have become desensitized to the news. And their reaction can be appreciated by the remarks on social media. Some calling it a "fear-mongering garbage", others calling it 'a conspiracy backed by pharmaceutical giants.'

In psychology, desensitization is a process in which

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repeated and prolonged exposure to a negative emotion could reduce response.⁵ A reduced response- a selfish attitude towards the disease- from a population to the stimulus -News- can be a major factor for uncontrolled spread. Public cooperation is required for the control of transmission, which can only be achieved if they understand the criticality of the situation. Furthermore, it can lead to a vicious cycle of an increased number of cases as misinformation floods in social media- my preferred one is it being claimed as a sexually transmitted infection. Hence it is obligatory to do proactive education of physicians and the general public to intensify the significance of prevention and in case of outbreak, to control the spread. It will help cope up with the misinformation around the media as well.

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