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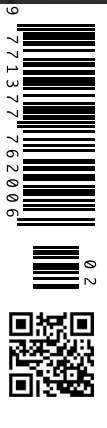
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Battle to Be Won by Virtue

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Healthcare workers around the world are overburdened, exhausted and anxious. But some of them take the time to sit back and reflect on what is happening. One such person, a leading expert at the COVID-19 reference hospital in Cyprus, talks about the feelings during the pandemic and the meaning of virtue in the face of a crisis.



Watching the dramatic expansion of the epidemic in China, although in the beginning it was considered a local problem, far away from our country, was frightening. We were devastated to see so many people losing their lives from this deadly new virus there and later in Europe. When the World Health Organization (WHO) upgraded the infection threat level to a pandemic, it was clearly a matter of time for the invisible enemy to reach our island.

Initially there was fear for the health of our families, loved ones and compatriots, but we, as health professionals, knew that we had to take action to prevent the

spread of the infection and prepare our health system to deal with a possible high number of people falling ill. Fortunately, the Ministry of Health foresaw the risks to our citizens and started emergency preparations early on.

On Humility

As part of the strategic plan, the Famagusta General Hospital (FGH) was designated as the COVID-19 reference centre. When we learnt that we were put on the frontline of the battle against COVID-19, the unexpected pandemic, the invisible enemy, it goes without saying



that our concerns skyrocketed. That was an unprecedented crisis that required a rapid response by means of reorganising the hospital services, resources and staff. Understandably, at first the healthcare workers were scared, apprehensive and fearful for their own and their families' health.

We resorted to self-criticism and self-knowledge to identify, as realistically as possible, but with our human limitations in mind, our capabilities to fulfil this sacred mission. We chose humility. We overcame the panic of responsibility as well as the arrogance and selfishness of those who have been chosen to be on the frontline in the war against the coronavirus. On the path towards the unknown, which always raises anxiety, distress, the fear of infection, the fear for our loved ones, the feeling of insecurity, all our scientific and humanitarian potential

Our patients' desire to recover became the beacon for our actions. With it in mind, we upgraded our planning and organisational skills through unprecedented unity and teamwork of all the bodies of the FGH. There was great solidarity of the state, society and ordinary citizens. We offered our patients treatment but also filled them with optimism and provided them psychological and emotional support. For the patients, the medical and paramedical staff of our hospital substituted for the warmth of the family.

Fortunately, the majority of our patients recovered and were discharged from the hospital. For the healthcare workers caring for them, every discharge was a personal achievement and a cause for celebrations. Our staff showed impressive humility, compassion, devotion and extraordinary unity while caring for these patients.

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had to be mobilised to support and live up to the expectations of our patients who saw us as their one and only lifeline.

On Fear

The main reason for the fear was the lack of knowledge of this newly-recognised infection. There were various aspects we had to learn about and get trained in very quickly. The first aspect was how to protect the healthcare workers, our patients and the society from this infection. But the most important was how to treat and care for patients with this disease. This required continuous training, studying of the latest medical literature, and communicating with colleagues from affected countries and learning from their experience. Equipped with the appropriate safety measures and knowledge, the fear of the infection was allayed. In no time, it was replaced by enthusiasm and willingness of the staff to get involved in the care of the people who unfortunately were stricken by the virus.

On Worst and Best

The loss of any patient under your care is always a very sad event, but in this particular case it was even worse because these patients could not have their loved ones around them in their final moments.

As they were in our care for quite some time, we developed a close bond with them, and the pain of their loss was similar to that of a family member.

On Being Prepared

We have reflected on the way we dealt with the first wave of the pandemic and drawn our conclusions. In the event of a second wave, our previous experience makes us better prepared to care for our patients. We already have all the required resources in place and the knowledge of treating these patients. Moreover, a significant amount of research is taking place all over the world, and we continue to keep ourselves up to date with the latest developments in the search of treatment and vaccination.

On Virtue

Equipped with the power of knowledge, training, protection, collaboration, appropriate resources, and compassion for the fellow human beings, we can save the lives of our patients.

We hope that the pandemic will be overcome. No matter what, the humanitarian ideals emerged victorious. Where there is dignity (or, more broadly, what in Greek we call *philotimo*) as well as determination, love, solidarity and humanity, battles against diseases are always won. This is the message sent by our reference hospital. Every recovery, every discharge filled us with happiness, joy and excitement. The pandemic caused so much suffering. Still, it has also highlighted the virtues of our nation. Our mutual support and solidarity is the culmination of virtue. Solidarity, love and humility not only heal but must also become the ultimate goal for our culture. ■