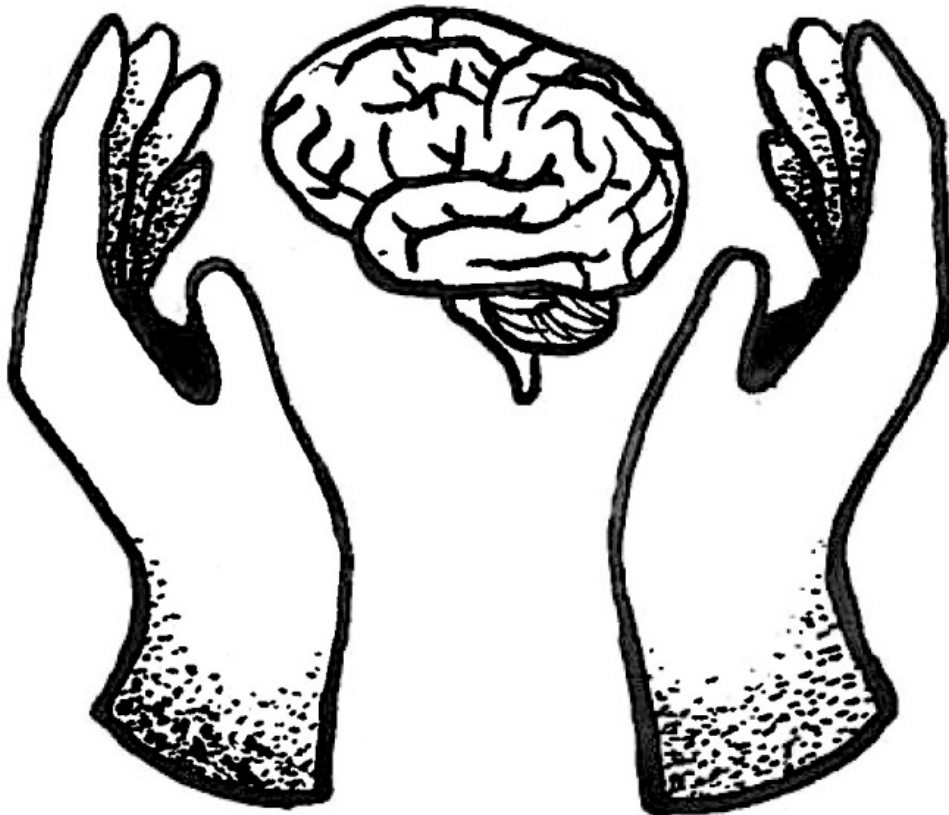


# NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2020

## HEALTH



## Urban Resource Centre

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## 50-bed infectious disease hospital to begin operation on July 10: Murad

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Wednesday that an infectious disease hospital (IDH) established along University Road, opposite NED University, would start operation on July 10.

He issued these directives to Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho and the vice chancellor of Dow University during his visit to the hospital on Wednesday morning.

The chief minister, accompanied by the health minister, visited the 50-bed double-storey hospital, which has a six-bed intensive care unit (ICU) and a high dependency unit (HDU). He visited each ward and personally witnessed operation of the radiology department, ventilators and oxygen system and the IT unit.

It is in fact the Dow University Dental Hospital which has been converted into the infectious disease hospital by the chief minister, injecting necessary funding and staff into it.

### *Coronavirus claims 29 more lives*

The chief minister directed the health department to post well-trained healthcare staff in the hospital and make it functional by July 10. "This hospital will be of great help to treat Covid-19 patients, even if any of them need only oxygen support or ventilators," he said and added that the X-ray unit/radiology department facility would also help save the lives of serious patients by diagnosing their chest complication. "This is a best facility that offers complete healthcare to Covid-19 patients," he said.

The chief minister said that in next 15 to 20 days, a 200-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients would start functioning at NIPA. "Alhamdulillah, we have managed to establish separate healthcare facilities for the corona patients in Karachi and we will be expanding it to every divisional headquarters," he said.

### **Coronavirus claims 29 more lives**

As many as 2,139 new cases of the novel coronavirus were detected after testing 8,201 samples and 29 more patients died overnight, lifting the death toll in the province to 1,406.

This was stated by Murad Ali Shah in a press statement issued here on Wednesday. He said 8,201 samples were tested against which 2,139 new cases of the coronavirus were detected that constituted a 28 per cent detection rate, one of the highest rates so far. The chief minister said that 461,587 samples had been tested so far, which diagnosed 86,139 cases all over Sindh, forming a 19pc overall detection rate.

Mr Shah said that 29 more patients lost their lives while struggling against the virus. He added that the number of Covid-19 patients that had died so far had risen to 1,406, constituting 1.6pc death rate.

The CM said that 1,703 more patients recovered and returned to normal life overnight. "The number of patients recovered so far comes to 48,527, constituting a 56pc recovery rate," he said.

Mr Shah said that currently out of 36,803 under-treatment patients, 35,131 were in home isolation, 158 at isolation centres and 1,514 at different hospitals. He added that currently 707 patients were in critical condition, of them 104 were on ventilators.

Giving district-wise data, the chief minister said that out of 2,139 new cases, 1,038 belonged to Karachi. Among them district East had 401, South 258, Central 125, Korangi 101, Malir 82 and West had 71 cases.

He added that Hyderabad had 129 new cases, Sukkur 86, Shikarpur 70, Sanghar 66, Larkana 58, Shaheed Benazirabad 50, Mirpurkhas 36, Ghotki 31, Badin 29, Dadu 24, Jacobabad 24, Jamshoro 12, Naushahro Feroze 10, Khairpur nine, Matiari eight, Sujawal five, Kashmore three, and Tando Allahyar Khan, Tando Mohammad Khan and Thatta had one case each.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 02/07/2020)

## 200-bed infectious diseases hospital inaugurated

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday inaugurated the newly established 200-bed Sindh Infectious Diseases Hospital that would start formal operation with 54 beds and expand within six weeks to its full capacity.

"I am upgrading its status as research centres so that necessary research on the coronavirus and such other diseases could be undertaken. Therefore, now its name would be the Sindh Infectious Diseases Hospital & Research Centre," he said while opening the facility.

The chief minister was accompanied by Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho and Information Minister Nasir Hussain Shah.

He said he had established two hospitals for coronavirus patients in Karachi and now other hospitals would be established in every divisional headquarters.

### *25 more Covid-19 patients die as 2,222 new cases emerge*

The 400-bed hospital has been constructed at a cost of Rs1,736.359 million near the NIPA traffic intersection.

A provincial government spokesman said that after the pandemic, the chief minister had decided to convert it into an infectious disease hospital. He released a special assistance to the health department so that it could be made operational.

He said the chief minister visited the incomplete structure of the hospital thrice within two months and got its blocks A & B completed. The Block C, ground plus five, is yet to be completed.

He said the chief minister handed over the task of execution and management to the Dow University of Health Sciences, adding that the vice chancellor of Dow University Prof Saeed Qureshi personally got all the hospital equipments installed to make it functional.

The spokesman said in the first phase, 200-bed hospitals housed in blocks A and B had been completed with a special grant released to the Dow University to functionalise it on a most urgent basis.

He said that at present, the works of ground and first floor of blocks A & B was complete and inaugurated by the chief minister. The spokesman said that the work included the HVAC system based on the principles required for any modern infectious diseases hospital. "In two floors inaugurated by the chief minister, total 54 beds will be functional as eight-bed ground floor emergency, 16-bed ICU with ventilator support and 34 HDU beds," he added.

He said that in the next phase, second and third floors, which would be made functional within the next six weeks there would be 32 ICU beds and 88 HDU beds.

"In addition to these beds, there are radiology services which include one 500MA X-ray machine, one mobile X-ray unit, one ultrasound machine and one mobile ultrasound unit," he said.

The spokesman said that there was a complete pharmacy service, including I.V. Admixture Pharmacy, and added that machinery and equipment made available in the hospital included brand new 16 ventilators, 200 monitors with telemetry system.

He said that the human resources posted in the hospital in the first phase included one medical superintendent, one additional MS, one manager (finance and accounts) and one assistant administrator.

Among the clinical staff, the spokesman said there was one assistant professor of infectious disease, one senior registrar, two critical care consultants, three junior critical care consultants, one manger infectious control, one manager nursing, 15 medical officers, nurses, five icu technicians, four pharmacy technicians, 15 war boy.

The janitorial and security services are contracted out.

#### **Covid-19 situation**

Sharing the Covid-19 situation report, the chief minister said that 2,222 new cases of the coronavirus were detected when 10,705 tests were conducted, constituting a 21 per cent detection rate.

He added that so far 502,426 samples had been tested against which 94,528 cases diagnosed all over Sindh.

"The overall detection rate is 9 per cent," he said.

The chief minister said that 25 more Covid-19 patients died overnight, lifting the death toll to 1,526 that constituted 1.6 per cent. He added that 777 more patients recovered and returned to normal life. "The number of patients who have recovered so far come to 53,165 that constitutes a 56 per cent recovery rate," he said.

The CM said that currently 39,837 patients were under treatment. Of them, 37,875 were in home isolation, 340 at isolation centres and 1,622 at different hospitals of the province.

He added that 623 patients were stated to be in a critical condition. Of them, 74 had been shifted onto the ventilators.

Mr Shah said that out of 2,222 new cases, Karachi had 770 cases. He added that district East had 237, South 156, Central 126, Korangi 113, Malir 72 and West 66 new cases.

The chief minister said that Ghotki had 294 new cases, Sukkur 128, Kambar 80, Shaheed Benazirabad 75, Dadu 73, Khairpur 61, Badin 57, T.M. Khan 54, Sanghar 51, Kashmore 50, Hyderabad 50, Larkana 48, Mirpurkhas 37, Tando Allahyar 36, Khairpur 33, Jacobabad 15, Matiari 14, Naushahro Feroze and Jamshoro 11 each, Thatta six, Sujawal five and Umerkot had four new cases. Murad Ali Shah said that the cases of local transmission were on the rise in Ghotki, Sukkur, Kambar, Shaheed Benazirabad, Dadu, Khairpur and Badin.

He directed the administrations of all the districts to take extraordinary measures to control the situation. "The rise in the cases is the result of disregard to the SOPs," he said.  
(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 06/07/2020)

### **NDMA to provide 525 beds to Sindh hospitals**

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will be providing 525 beds as well as ventilators to different hospitals in Sindh, announced NDMA chairperson Lieutenant General Muhammad Afzal on Monday.

While visiting various hospitals in Karachi, Lt Gen Afzal revealed that the NDMA would provide 525 beds to six hospitals in Sindh, including Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) and Sindh Government Qatar Hospital. He further disclosed that ASH in particular would receive 125 beds, 18 ventilators and 29 BiPap ventilators.

He also met Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and discussed strategies to control the spread of Covid-19 in the province as well as combat the locust swarms.

According to Lt Gen Afzal, the National Locust Control Centre had played an effective role in dealing with the pests. He added that insects have been eliminated in Punjab while efforts to eliminate them are being taken in Sindh.

Ismail appreciated the NDMA for its efforts to control of the spread of coronavirus and locusts in the province.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 14/07/2020)

### **Polio vaccination to resume from July 20**

The Sindh Emergency Operation Centre for polio announced on Tuesday the resumption of polio vaccination activities in Karachi from July 20.

In a statement issued on the day, the EOC said that polio vaccination would be resumed with the launch of a small-scale campaign in the metropolis, covering approximately 260,000 children under the age of five in Baldia, Orangi Town, North Nazimabad, Liaquatabad, SITE Area and other areas. Later, the scope of the campaign will be widened, with multiple vaccination drives being conducted in different parts of Sindh until year end.

Speaking on the matter, the EOC spokesperson said, "These campaigns are of utmost importance as we must administer oral polio vaccine to children, to save them from the crippling disease and to ensure a healthy future for them."

He pointed out that Pakistan was one of the only two countries afflicted by polio and had so far reported 58 polio cases this year, of which 20 belonged to Sindh.

#### **Filling the immunity gap**

The vaccination drive set to begin on July 20 will be the first polio campaign launched in the country since the coronavirus outbreak.

According to the EOC spokesperson, the EOC faced a setback due to the pandemic when global polio campaigns were halted in March this year.

The spokesperson explained that "Sindh had back-to-back successful campaigns from December 2019 to March 2020 which had gone a long way to put the polio programme on track."

"However, since the outbreak of Covid-19, no campaigns could be conducted while routine immunisation was also severely affected, leaving an immunity gap which must immediately be addressed as children are more susceptible to the virus than before," he said.

"It is absolutely necessary now that these vaccines are provided to fill the immunity gap in children," he added. "While we deal with the pandemic, we must also deal with childhood immunisation to prevent childhood diseases," he stressed.

The EOC spokesperson maintained that the benefits of vaccination far outweighed the risk of coronavirus transmission, adding that the Sindh government was committed to providing these "life-saving [polio] vaccines" to children, so that the immunity gap, which had emerged due to the suspension of polio vaccination activities following the pandemic, could be decreased.

In order to make up for the gap in polio campaigns, the EOC Sindh has requested all parents to cooperate with polio teams, letting them administer polio drops to their children under the age of five.

The door-to-door campaigns would also be utilised to raise awareness about coronavirus prevention as well as for referring mothers and children for other essential vaccinations and antenatal care services.

#### **Precautionary measures**

Talking about safety measures during the campaign, the EOC spokesperson said, "We are taking all precautionary measures recommended by the World Health Organisation for the upcoming campaigns [and] parents have nothing to fear."

"Our workers have been provided sanitisers, masks, gloves and will not directly handle any child, not knock at doors and not interact closely with parents, spending minimum time at doorsteps," he assured.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 15/07/2020)

### **Vaccinated, sterilised dogs found poisoned to death in Clifton**

A number of stray dogs, which had been vaccinated and tagged under the Rabies Free Pakistan project, were recently found poisoned in a ground in Clifton's Block 7, officials associated with the project told [Dawn](#).

The project is run by the Indus Hospital (IH).

Expressing shock at the incident, Mohammad Aftab Gohar, the manager of the rabies prevention centre at the IH, said that such inhumane acts would nullify the efforts being taken to tackle the issue of rabies and stray dog population in a humane and scientific manner.

"It's a major blow to our efforts. We are unable to understand why any department would resort to dogs' culling given the fact that all government departments concerned are on board on this project. The government is also in the process of finalising a vaccination and sterilisation project for stray dogs," he said.

To a question, he said four dogs out of eight spotted dead were vaccinated, sterilised and tagged. The team was still inquiring about the department involved in dogs' culling.

*Over 20,000 dogs have been vaccinated under an anti-rabies project in Ibrahim Hyderi, Korangi, parts of district South*

"In the meantime, our team has taken up the matter with the deputy commissioner South today (Friday) in a meeting. He has assured us that this wouldn't happen again," he added.

#### **Over 20,000 dogs vaccinated, 3,000 neutered**

Mr Gohar emphasised that such brutal and ineffective methods to tackle the issue of rabies and stray dogs must end.

So far, according to him, more than 20,000 dogs have been vaccinated and over 3,000 neutered/spayed under the project in Ibrahim Hyderi, Korangi and parts of district South.

Sharing details of the incident, Rahil Barkat, the field coordinator of the project team operating in Clifton, said the team spotted eight to nine dogs dead in a ground near a drain when they reached the place to release some other vaccinated dogs on Wednesday.

"These dogs had been released just a day earlier after getting vaccinated and sterilised by our team. Three had collars while two were tagged on the ears. The rest were neither vaccinated nor sterilised," he said, adding that the team released dogs after treatment at the same place from where they were caught.

According to him, the team has been hearing about stray dogs' culling being carried out by the district municipal corporations (DMCs) in different parts of the city but had no evidence to report against these cases. "Now, we have evidence. This is extremely unfortunate."

No local government official was available for comments.

It is important to mention here that culling has often been carried out by various government departments and private agencies as a method to control the population of stray dogs.

Experts, however, believe that the method is ineffective besides being cruel. They emphasise the need to implement a one-health approach, which has shown positive outcomes in other countries.

The strategy involves management of stray dog population through vaccination and sterilisation.

The method, the experts say, would gradually reduce stray dog population and over time build immunity in the dog population against rabies — a viral disease which has become a major health problem in Sindh, which frequently faces shortages of life-saving anti-rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin.

Dogs are responsible for transmission of rabies virus to humans in 99 per cent cases. The disease is fatal following the onset of clinical symptoms.

In addition, the experts believe that it's high time the government put in place a proper mechanism for solid waste disposal as poor civic conditions help breed animal populations and disease-causing organisms.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 18/07/2020)

### **Risk to medics**

THE tragic death of a respected surgeon in Multan has sent shockwaves across the medical community. Dr Mustafa Kamal Pasha, who was also the vice chancellor of Multan's Nishtar Medical University, passed away this week, a month after contracting the coronavirus. Dr Pasha was diagnosed with Covid-19 on June 14 and was under treatment at a private hospital in Multan. He was put on a ventilator on July 6 and succumbed to the virus a week later. Many in the medical community as well as his patients are mourning the loss of a top doctor in south Punjab. His death also underscored the truly deadly manifestation of Covid-19, which is easily transmissible. His passing serves as a harrowing reminder of the great sacrifice that our front-line workers are making in the ongoing battle against Covid-19.

Nurses, doctors and hospital staff are faced with an unprecedented situation as they deal with patients infected with the novel coronavirus. Since the beginning of the outbreak, Pakistan's medical community has been warning people against gathering in

crowded spaces, and asking them to take precautions as they fear that large numbers of patients would make it difficult for hospitals to cope, as in Europe during the virus's peak. While we may not have arrived at that stage, healthcare workers continue to undertake their medical responsibilities at great personal risk — much like Dr Pasha who put his life on the line. Hospital staff members have to wear protective suits, face masks, goggles and gloves for hours during their shifts as they treat suspected and confirmed Covid-19 patients. Many of them fear for their family members as the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus to them is significant. This undoubtedly results in high levels of stress and takes a huge toll on the mental health of the medical community. It must be acknowledged that these workers are taking incredible risks in the face of this deadly virus. The government and public should take measures to ensure that the threat to healthcare staff is minimised.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 18/07/2020)

### **Asad Umar promises centre's help for upgrade of Abbasi Shaheed Hospital**

Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar along with Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar visited the Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre (IDRC) established at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital on Saturday.

Metropolitan Commissioner Dr Syed Saif ur Rehman and other officials were also present. Talking to media after the visit, Mr Umar thanked the mayor for inviting him to visit the centre. He said the federal government would fully support Karachi as it is the biggest city of Pakistan.

The federal minister said that a record amount was allocated for health sector in the federal budget for fiscal year 2020-21, adding that efforts were being made across the country with assistance of respective provincial governments.

He said that basically health was a provincial subject but since “we are facing a pandemic and emergency situation, we have decided to establish 7,000 beds across the country till July 2020.

*Tells Karachi mayor he will talk to Sindh CM to resolve fiscal issues of hospitals*

“Out of these 7,000 beds, 500 beds will be established in Karachi. I am grateful that Abbasi Shaheed Hospital has completed its task for establishment of the beds,” he added.

Mr Umar said that a modern laboratory should also be established along with the IDRC. “The centre would fully support the KMC for upgradation of the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital,” he said.

The federal minister said that he would talk to the chairman of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) to ensure provision of oxygen kits for isolation ward at the KMC's hospital.

“I will also ask Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to resolve financial issues of health institutions including Abbasi Shaheed Hospital,” he added.

#### **‘Only LG-run hospital in country doing Covid testing’**

Mayor Akhtar expressed his gratitude to the federal minister for visiting the hospital and said that they were trying to upgrade the facility for the past four years but could not do so due to shortage of funds.

He said that they got an opportunity after Covid-19 to upgrade the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, which was the third largest hospital of Karachi and catered to the poor patients not only of Karachi but entire Sindh.

The mayor said that the KMC had started coronavirus testing facility at the hospital and the people were being tested free of cost and without any discrimination.

“A laboratory is updated [while] ICUs and isolation ward are established, which is a big achievement in view of limited resources of the KMC,” he said.

Mr Akhtar added that he could proudly say that no local government in Pakistan except the KMC was testing Covid-19 patients.

“This is a gift for Karachiites from the KMC. The PDMA and federal government assisted us and our team succeeded,” he added.

The mayor also appreciated Dr Rehman, doctors, paramedics and other health workers who were combating the virus on the front line.

He said the KMC was also assisted by philanthropists.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 19/07/2020)

### **Rise in drug prices**

In keeping with its policy of making essential items unaffordable, the government has reportedly allowed drug companies to increase prices. The fact that this decision comes in the middle of a national and global health crisis is not lost on us. While the government may claim that the increase is tied to inflation, we would ask why drug prices in Pakistan remain among the highest in the region.

Pakistan's continuing failure to embrace generic drugs is a significant part of the problem. While other countries in the region, Africa, and even some developed countries encourage their pharmaceutical industries to churn out generic drugs at a fraction of the price, we have gone the other way. Most of our industry is licensing brand names, even where no patent applies. This allows for significant profits and unnecessary deaths of those that cannot afford brand name prices.

One of the excuses for this has been that it helps keep the prices of life-saving patented drugs lower than if the same were imported. Given Pakistan's raw population, this is just an excuse. No drug manufacturer will ignore a market of 200 million people if it stands to make any money, especially because the production of patented drugs is all profit once research costs are recovered. The government could also use legal exemptions to allow for the domestic production of patented life-saving drugs if pharmaceutical giants refuse to allow their sale at affordable prices. That's how Indian generic manufacturers went ahead and started producing HIV/AIDS drugs for which they couldn't afford the patent.

Unfortunately, our policymakers seem to value the wallets of pharmaceutical executives too much to let them worry about competition from generics. Then there is the problem of the regulator. Under the new rules, the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan can only freeze a manufacturer's price hike for 30 days to see if the change is justified before it is essentially forced to approve the increase anyway. Given that DRAP cannot actually block a price increase anymore, would it not be better to just close up shop and let the pharmaceutical companies do whatever they want?

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 21/07/2020)

### **Abbasi Shaheed Hospital faces shortage of funds, staff**

Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH), one of Karachi's largest public hospitals, has been struggling in the face of an acute shortage of funds and staff, it emerged on Sunday.

According to sources at ASH, who asked not to be named, the hospital, run under the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), is unable to keep up with the persistent lack of funds and seamlessly cater to patients, particularly indoor patients and those visiting the outpatient department.

In fact, it is struggling to keep running amid the shortage of medical staff and life-saving drugs, unavailability of diagnostic facilities, a lack of resources to provide food to patients, non-functional wards, insufficient water supply, out of order equipment and numerous other challenges, the sources revealed.

Consequently, the hospital has witnessed a decline in patient footfall.

#### **Limited funds**

The hospital sources ascribed the worsening condition of healthcare at the facility to it receiving limited funds from the KMC and the Sindh government for a decade.

It is somehow managing to sustain on limited funds released by the KMC and donations, they explained, adding that the hospital, housing over 900 beds, didn't even received 20 per cent of the budget allocated to it.

#### **Shorthanded**

Further aggravating the situation are vacant posts at the facility, including those of medical officers, consultants, nurses, sweepers, security guards, technicians, paramedics and other administrative staff.

As per the hospital sources, these posts have been lying vacant for several years.

Consequently, inexperienced junior doctor have been running multiple departments, while some others are on the verge of closure.

#### **Out of order**

Meanwhile, important diagnostic equipment, approximately 40 per cent of what is owned by the facility, has worn out after years of use and is in dire need of replacement. Moreover, magnetic resonance imaging machines and computerised tomography scan machines are also non-functional, while the hospital administration lacks funds to get them repaired.

When contacted, KMC medical and health services senior director Dr Birbal Genani remained unavailable to comment on the matter.

(By PPI The Express Tribune, 04, 27/07/2020)

### **PMA cautions govt against reopening all sectors 'in haste**

The Pakistan Medical Association has expressed its surprise over the government's decision to reopen all sectors at the same time. In a statement issued here, it said that the government had announced to open almost all sectors in the country from Aug 8, which the PMA described as a "decision in haste".

According to the government announcement, schools and marriage halls would also reopen in September.

The PMA said that while the government was opening all sectors for the betterment of the people, it was necessary to save the people from the coronavirus as well.

“We are still under quarantine period for monitoring corona cases after Eidul Azha. And after five to six days we will be able to know how many new cases have emerged after Eid. We believe that the government has taken this decision in haste because our upcoming festivals and important events like Independence Day, Muharram and Rabi al-Awwal are very close. This decision should have been made after these dates,” the PMA said in the statement.

“Majalis, processions and religious gatherings would be held in Muharram and Rabi al-Awwal. And it has been observed that 80 to 85 per cent people do not follow SOPs nowadays. Even in the government offices people do not adopt preventive measures,” the PMA added.

It said that it was the responsibility of the government to implement SOPs strictly.

“It is appreciable that the government will review the situation before reopening schools. We suggest that corona test (antibodies test) of all the staff, including van drivers and attendants, is done before reopening of educational institutes because one infected person can spread the disease to the whole institution.”

Moreover, it is suggested that educational institutes are reopened stepwise and primary and pre-primary classes are reopened last. Other countries eased their lockdowns and opened different sectors at a time when their cases decreased. But now again cases have increased in the second phase in countries like the United States, UK, Brazil, Australia, China and South Korea, the statement added.

“It is a fact that the number of cases of coronavirus and number of deaths are decreasing in Pakistan from the month of July, but unfortunately as per our information, the number of cases are increasing in Skardu, Gilgit and other nearby areas. We are scared that our graph may increase again. It could increase the burden on our hospitals and healthcare workers like it happened after Eidul Fitr.”

According to a PMA report, 101 doctors and 24 paramedics have died during this war against coronavirus.

The PMA once again requested the people to follow SOPs and continuously adopt preventive measures.

Wear mask, keep social distance, wash or sanitise hands, avoid going out and avoid going into crowds, it said.

“PMA believes that the government should feel its responsibility and implement the SOPs strictly. The government should maintain economic activities and should also keep the public safe from coronavirus.

“We hope that it doesn't turn out that deadly virus is eliminated from the world, but continues to exist in Pakistan.”  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 09/08/2020)

### Russian vaccine

A stunning announcement from Russia regarding a potential vaccine for the Covid-19 coronavirus made headlines across the world on Tuesday. Unfortunately, on closer examination, what looked like fantastic news must now be taken with many pounds of salt. This is because, among other things, the Russian vaccine candidate, Sputnik-V, never underwent Phase 3 trials. Phase 3 trials are the most important stage of testing for medicines and vaccines. In this phase, thousands of test subjects are given the vaccine or a placebo. Then, they are watched for months to determine the drug's effectiveness and side effects.

Russia has also released no safety data about the vaccine. Although Putin claims one of his daughters has already taken it, without proof, his statement can be dismissed as political, rather than scientific. Also, even if we believe the vaccine did work on Putin's daughter and some other test subjects, without a broad-based trial, there is no data on its efficacy. The polio vaccine, for example, is about 99% effective if doses are delivered correctly. The measles vaccine is about 98%. On the other hand, some flu vaccines have efficacy rates as low as 8%, because the focus in their development is on minimising side effects.

Putin could honestly claim to have a working vaccine, even if its efficacy is only 1%. Even if the actual efficacy rate is reasonably high, it is worth noting that US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci previously said that the first Covid-19 vaccine — whoever develops it — will probably not have an efficacy rate higher than 60%. Given that Russia is not releasing data or even conducting proper trials, it is unlikely that Moscow will be providing the magic potion that kills Covid. In fact, such a rushed and untested drug could be disastrous for people with underlying health conditions.

But it might be just the shot in the arm that Putin personally needs. Despite recent election success, Putin's popularity is near its lowest in his two decades in power. Success for Sputnik-V — a name which harkens to the golden age of Soviet space exploration — could change that.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 13/08/2020)

### The polio battle

DISTURBING reports have yet again surfaced about the manhandling of polio workers in Bhawalnagar and Faisalabad as immunisation campaigns resume after a hiatus of at least five months. In the latest incidents, residents in three separate areas of Bhawalnagar, besides refusing to get their children vaccinated, hurled threats at the vaccinators and manhandled them while also harassing female health workers. Meanwhile in Faisalabad, a couple thrashed female polio workers after they rang the doorbell of



their house. Earlier in January, two polio workers were killed by unidentified gunmen in Swabi, while in December last year, two policemen deputised on security duty were shot dead in Lower Dir. Polio eradication efforts in Pakistan had already witnessed grave setbacks since the beginning of 2019. Along with a steady and heavy rise in the number of wild and vaccine-derived polio cases (a total of 149 as compared to 12 and eight cases in 2018 and 2017), a malicious propaganda against polio eradication efforts further fuelled public resentment, causing an increase in the number of parents refusing to get their children vaccinated. Then the unwelcome advent of Covid-19 exacerbated matters as polio immunisation campaigns and most routine immunisation also remained suspended between March and July, with resources being diverted towards measures to curb the pandemic. Hence, in this period, some 40m children in the country missed vaccinations against polio, while around 60 were diagnosed with the wild poliovirus between January and July.

Like Covid-19, polio is also a highly infectious illness and health experts are concerned that the months-long gaps in immunisation efforts might have reversed the headway made towards the eradication of the disease. Targeted vaccination drives have again resumed in several parts of the country and health workers are once more putting their lives on the line for minimal compensation. Perhaps the authorities could learn from the Covid-19 success and set up a similar, centralised pool of resources for polio eradication to drive this menace out of the country.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 21/08/2020)

### Drug prices

The health ministry has announced that citizens will be getting a temporary reprieve from escalating drug prices. The ministry has reached an agreement with pharmaceutical companies to defer any price hikes until after the first quarter of the financial year. The agreement means that consumers will not see any price increases until the end of the year, at the earliest. This is because new prices only apply to drugs produced after an increase is approved. The government was at pains to remind that it was also able to convince drug companies not to increase prices during the previous quarter.

The current announcement was technically another deferral of the increases that manufacturers wanted to implement earlier. Under the current rules, pharma companies are allowed to increase the prices of essential drugs by 7% and non-essential medicines by 10% in line with the official inflation rate. On paper, any increases are also subject to government approval. The process has come in for some criticism because, as we mentioned, the government's authority to block increases is only on paper. An adequately documented application to increase prices is virtually bulletproof, whatever the circumstances. This is because the incumbent federal government amended drug pricing rules. Now, if a price hike request is not approved within 30 days, the new prices will become effective anyway.

On the other hand, pharma manufacturers said they were on board with the price freeze in light of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, but they also gave a straightforward reason for why they need to increase prices, and why the government may have to ease the restrictions on maximum increases. That reason was devaluation. The rupee has fallen by about 9% against the dollar since March, and there is little proof that the decline will be reversed anytime soon. That 9% is a significant dent for manufacturers. Given the already-high inflation rate, the price increase restrictions just won't cut it for many manufacturers. This presents a major headache for the government. Continue to push for a public-friendly price freeze and risk bankrupting local manufacturers, or risk letting pharma companies go rogue?

(By Editorial Dawn, 14, 25/08/2020)

### Africa now free of poliovirus, says WHO

The UN's World Health Organisation (WHO) on Tuesday declared that Africa was now free of the virus that causes polio, a landmark in a decades-long campaign to eradicate the disease around the world.

"Today is a historic day for Africa," said Prof Rose Gana Fomban Leke, whose commission certified that no cases had occurred on the continent for the past four years, the threshold for eradication of poliovirus.

Poliovirus now joins smallpox in the list of viruses that have been wiped out in Africa, the WHO said.

Since 1996, eradication efforts "have prevented up to 1.8 million children from crippling life-long paralysis and saved approximately 180,000 lives", the agency said.

Poliomyelitis — the medical term for polio — is an acutely infectious and contagious virus which attacks the spinal cord and causes irreversible paralysis in children.

It was endemic around the world until a vaccine was found in the 1950s, though this remained out of reach for many poorer countries in Asia and Africa.

In 1988, when the WHO, Unicef and Rotary launched the worldwide campaign to eradicate the disease, there were 350,000 cases globally. In 1996, there were more than 70,000 cases in Africa alone.

Thanks to a global effort and financial backing -- some \$19 billion over 30 years -- only Afghanistan and Pakistan have recorded cases this year: 87 in total.

Poliovirus is typically spread in the faeces of an infected person and is picked up through contaminated water or food.

Vaccinating people to prevent them from becoming infected thus breaks the cycle of transmission and eventually eradicates the virus in the wild.

The last case of polio in Africa was detected in 2016 in Nigeria, where vaccination efforts had been hampered by Boko Haram terrorists.

More than 20 workers involved in the campaign lost their lives.

“This is a momentous milestone for Africa. Now future generations of African children can live free of wild polio,” said Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO’s regional director for Africa.

“This historic achievement was only possible thanks to the leadership and commitment of governments, communities, global polio eradication partners and philanthropists,” Moeti said.

“I pay special tribute to the frontline health workers and vaccinators, some of whom lost their lives, for this noble cause.”  
(By AFP Dawn, 01, 26/08/2020)

### **Sinking system: Karachi hospitals flooded amid cloudburst**

As the metropolis witnessed its fifth spell of heavy downpour starting Tuesday, the city of 20 million has once again found itself on the short end of the infrastructural stick. Other than causing deadly urban floods and structural collapses, unforgiving monsoon showers have also inundated Karachi’s multiple public and private medical care facilities, leaving the city’s healthcare system in dire straits. Per initial reports, operations at several major facilities including The Civil Hospital Karachi, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Sobraj Maternity Hospital and The National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases have been severely affected due to accumulated rainwater.

“Almost 50 per cent of the wards here including the accident ward, radiology department, the dental outpatient department and the cardiology ward have been completely flooded with rainwater and effluent waste. The smell is so bad that we can’t even step into the surgery ward anymore. It reeks of sewage,” shared a resident doctor at the Civil Hospital Karachi, on conditions of anonymity. According to hospital management, despite being one of the city’s largest tertiary care facilities, Karachi’s Civil Hospital lacks a proper drainage system. This puts the building at the risk of flooding, every time there is a heavy downpour in the city. “A majority of the hospital units were declared damaged well before the season’s rainfall, but no action was taken on that. It is a known fact that sewage lines here are choked and tattered and yet there have been no repairs for years. So it was inevitable for the hospital to be flooded with sewage waste,” said a member of the hospital administration. “The roof’s also started leaking and there’s water coming in from everywhere. There is a risk that stocks of drugs and vaccines may go bad, while lack of electricity and water accumulation has made it very difficult for hospital staff to keep working,” claimed another.

On the other hand, speaking to The Express Tribune about the situation, Medical Superintendent Dr. Noor Kahmad Soomro said that the accumulation of rainwater in the hospital building is owed to blockage of the main sewerage system at Chand Bibi. “The blockage prevented rainwater from being drained out of the hospital. This obstructed several administrative matters and staff and patients both were severely inconvenienced by the flooding. However, we have managed to drain out up to 80 per cent of the accumulated water so far,” informed Soomro.

#### **Government Efforts**

According to sources privy to the development, an emergency control room was established by the health department following Karachi’s monsoon forecast. However, no specific safety measures were announced by the control room nor were there any steps taken to deal with the emergency situation. Several other hospitals in the city, including The National Institute of Cardiology, National Institute of Pediatrics, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Sindh Government Hospital Liaquatabad, Lyari General Hospital and the Qatar Hospital were also severely affected by the season’s cloudburst. As a result, hundreds of patients across the city were deprived of access to medical facilities, leaving the city’s healthcare system in dire straits.  
(By Tufail Ahmed The Express Tribune, 04, 26/08/2020)

### **Polio storm**

THE global monitoring body for polio has voiced serious reservations regarding the prospects for eradicating the crippling disease in Pakistan. In its latest report, the Independent Monitoring Board has stated in no uncertain terms that cases of both wild and vaccine-derived poliovirus are about to rise sharply. The report raises concerns about the strategic and technical capabilities of the Pakistan Polio Programme while warning that the number of cases could be in the hundreds if mass vaccination drives do not resume soon. At a time when Africa has been declared polio-free, the IMB report contains damning revelations about Pakistan’s blundering response to eradicating this disease. In its no-holds-barred assessment, the document states: “There is every possibility that Pakistan will be the last place on Earth to harbour this terrible disease.”

At least 61 cases of wild poliovirus surfaced in the country until July 31, 2020; in the corresponding period last year, the number was 56. Moreover, in 2018 and 2017, the total number of polio cases was 12 and eight respectively. The IMB report pinpoints criminal lapses in the authorities’ management of the Polio Programme, while raising alarm that an outbreak of vaccine-derived polio is on the horizon. It highlights the transference of wild poliovirus from its core reservoirs of Karachi and Quetta to the southern parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Lahore, a situation exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Besides calling out the federal government for setting up the National Strategic Advisory Group in November 2019 and then seemingly forgetting about it, the report also makes special mention of the Sindh government for not being able to appoint a single qualified medical officer in the eight super-high-risk

union councils of Karachi. In Balochistan, the movement of people across the Pak-Afghan border renders the situation even more complex. The report states that vaccination of large numbers of children who traverse the border daily is way below par, risking transfer of the virus between the world's two remaining polio-endemic countries. It stresses the need for a "transformational change" in anti-polio efforts and greater collaboration with Afghan authorities to curb the spread of the disease. Our leadership would also do well to seek Nigeria's advice; the latter country has been able to win the battle against polio despite also being hit by militancy. There is no time for dilly-dallying; all caveats and excuses must be set aside to achieve the task ahead.  
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 30/08/2020)

### **Typhoid, cholera outbreak feared due to Karachi's post-rain insanitary conditions**

Expressing serious concerns over the prevailing poor post-rain civic conditions in the city, representative bodies of doctors warned on Friday that the situation might lead to outbreaks of different diseases if the government did not wake up to the threat and started acting diligently.



They sought government attention towards one of the city's long-standing issues pertaining to the obsolete water supply and sewerage system, often causing mixing of water with sewage and making people ill due to waterborne diseases.

They also urged the public to adopt all preventive health measures and demonstrate ownership and civic responsibility towards their locality by ensuring that solid waste was properly disposed of and effectively seeking government intervention, where required.

Following last week's torrential rains, the sewerage system of the city — already in fragile condition — collapsed completely, resulting in filthy water flooding almost all thoroughfares and neighbourhoods of the metropolis.

"It's the sewage-mixed rainwater making people's life miserable these days. All over the world, the sewerage and rainwater drainage systems are kept separate and the latter is harvested for public use. Unfortunately, however, we not only failed to devise such a system in decades but created more mess by allowing encroachment of city's major drains," said Dr Qaiser Sajjad of the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA).

*PIMA asks government to launch a fumigation drive in city*

The government, he emphasised, must take immediate notice of the dilapidated drainage/sewerage and water supply systems and upgrade them on a war-footing basis as the city might see heavier rains next year due to changing climatic conditions.

Besides, he pointed out, the city's filthy post-rain civic conditions might cause outbreaks of different diseases, particularly those caused by contaminated water and mosquitoes including typhoid, cholera, gastroenteritis, hepatitis A and E, and dengue.

"People living in such conditions are also vulnerable to skin and eye diseases. Hence, it is extremely important that the government act fast and people should adopt preventive measures such as boiling water for drinking purposes, if mineral bottled water is not available, and disposing of waste properly."

Sharing concerns over many deaths from electrocution, Dr Sajjad urged the provincial and federal governments to look into the pathetic performance of K-Electric and make the power utility accountable.

"Like water, electricity is a basic necessity and not a luxury. So many lives are lost to electrocution whenever there is rain in the city and people are deprived of electricity for days but there hasn't been any improvement in the power utility's system for years," he said.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) has demanded that the government fumigate all areas where rainwater/sewage was still standing and ensure supply of typhoid vaccine and other medicines in the market.

The association urged people to make use of mosquito nets and anti-mosquito sprays at night, demonstrate caution while eating out and buying food products, ensure hand hygiene and wear face masks at crowded places.  
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 05/09/2020)

### **Mosquito infestation**

Many of us have seen humans inside nets to save themselves from the nuisance-creating and harmful mosquitoes but not even few have ever seen animals being kept inside nets to protect them from the menace of mosquitoes. This newspaper has carried a picture showing both humans and animals inside one net in lower Sindh to protect themselves and their precious livestock from mosquito bites. A report carried with the picture says mosquitoes have multiplied exponentially in the aftermath of recent rains.

This year, unusually big-size mosquitoes have infested the rain-affected areas and regions close to them. Area residents say this year mosquitoes have become a menace not only for humans causing malaria and dengue, they are killing their cattle as well. Their homes and crops have been washed away by the floods and they are now left only with their livestock on which they are banking to get a living, so they are trying to protect them as best as they can. The situation is so bad and vexatious that they cannot step out of their nets after sunset.

Fumigation has been stopped when it is needed most. There are no medical camps in affected areas either, and the residents — left at the mercy of these dangerous insects — spend the whole night scratching their mosquito bites. As aptly pointed out by a local activist, people in flood-affected areas need mosquito nets more than food rations.

According to a senior official of Mirpurkhas division, fumigation halted after the tenure of local governments had ended last week. Local government employees have stopped working after the end of local governments' term, and this is seriously hindering rehabilitation work in flood-hit areas. Many locals are of the view — and quite rightly so — that fumigation is not enough to combat the mosquito menace; draining away of rainwater is the only effective solution, for the problem with mosquitoes is that, swatted away from one place they invade other places. These mosquitoes are so stubborn that anti-repellants and suchlike things are ineffective against them.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 13/09/2020)

### **Provincial authorities told to file report on proposed DNA law**

The Sindh High Court has sought reports from the provincial authorities about the status of a proposed draft of DNA law as well as from the criminal justice coordination committees on the aspects of crime prevention and identification of criminals.

A single-judge bench of SHC headed by Justice Salahuddin Panhwar also directed the inspector general of police to provide a complete list of absconders/proclaimed offenders to the home department so that it would ensure publication of the names of the fugitives in newspapers within a month.

Stressing upon the need of forensic sciences to improve criminal justice system, the bench also called a detailed report regarding a memorandum of understanding signed in January between the Sindh police and the Center for Digital Forensic Sciences and Technology, University of Karachi, to strengthen scientific and research cooperation.

The bench also directed the provincial secretary of the universities and boards to file a report till the next hearing with regard to the establishment of digital forensic colleges/institutions and courses being offered by universities of the province.

*SHC asks police chief to provide complete list of absconders to home dept for publication*

At the outset of the hearing, the amicus curiae submitted a copy of proposed DNA law and focal person of police's legal branch filed a detailed report along with mechanism for improving criminal justice system and undertook that names of all proclaimed offenders would be flashed at least in three Sindhi, Urdu and English language newspapers.

However, the focal person said the publication was the domain of the home department and such a compliance report had been called from it, which was awaited.

The bench observed that the basic objective of the criminal justice system was not limited to get punishment for criminals, but the prime object was to prevent crimes which required adopting all measures first for preventing crimes and then to get the culprits punished from a court of law.

It further said that the use of modern devices including CCTV cameras and DNA testing were the greatest examples set by the world for preventing crimes as well reaching to the criminals and the importance of DNA in criminal cases was also affirmed by the apex court.

"The draft of DNA law shall be sent to the Law Department, Government of Sindh through Secretary Law for perusal with further direction to submit report whether any legislation is expected in this issue," it added.

The bench also expressed resentment over the delay in the publication of the list of absconders and proclaimed offenders for want of approval by the home department and directed to publish it in 30 days.

The focal person of legal branch of police in his report stated that many provision were available in the Sindh (Repeal of the Police Act 1861 and Revival of Police Order, 2002 (Amendment) Act, 2019 for improving the criminal justice system.

The report further said that the criminal justice coordination committees were also established at district level under this act and such committees were headed by the district and sessions judges while deputy commissioners, SSP, district prosecutor, district superintendent jail, district probation officer, district parole officer, district investigation head, president of district bar association, district social welfare officer, district women development officer, district health officer, secretary district public safety and police complaint commission were the members.

The functions of such committees to keep under review the operation of the criminal justice system and work towards the improvement of the system as a whole by promoting coordination, exchange information, formulate coordinated priorities and plans, it added.

The bench observed that since the crime prevention and criminals' identification had specifically been included among the branches of criminal justice system, therefore the criminal justice coordination committees would also include such aspects during their meetings and come up with suggestions to cover these issues on a priority basis.

Adjourning the hearing till Nov 2, the bench called reports from every district and sessions judge/chairman criminal justice coordination committee all over the province on these aspects.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/09/2020)

### Experts fear spike in waterborne diseases in city's residents

Waterborne diseases and skin infections are on the rise mainly due to prevailing unhygienic conditions and supply of contaminated water to many parts of the city. It is time that the government addresses these chronic issues for good and plans preventive health strategies.

This was stated by doctors talking to Dawn regarding the outbreak of post-monsoon diseases.

There were also typhoid cases, they pointed out, mostly involving children, often showing signs of multidrug resistant (MDR) typhoid. Its treatment was extensive and costly, they added.

They also feared a spike in mosquito-borne ailments if sewage from overflowing gutters and accumulated rainwater still standing in many parks and playgrounds was not drained out.

*The number of people with respiratory diseases is also on the rise because of dust pollution*

"Thirty to 40 per cent of cases that I examine in the outpatient department (OPD) daily pertain to waterborne diseases, particularly gastroenteritis and skin infections," said Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro, a senior general physician in Keamari, also representing the Pakistan Medical Association.

"The rise in the number of such patients indicates that the government hasn't yet taken notice of the city's fragile sewerage system, which collapsed during last month's devastating rains," he said, highlighting the need for replacing the city's obsolete sewerage and water lines to prevent water contamination.

#### Dust pollution

Sharing similar concerns, Dr Altaf Khatri, a senior general physician running a private clinic in Lyari, said his daily OPD also included a high number of patients with respiratory diseases. A major reason behind this was increasing dust pollution, he added.

"These people could barely make ends meet and are troubled more in crisis-like situations. The good news is that the government can support them by planning and enforcing preventive strategies in the health sector, including routine immunisation and creating awareness about basic hygiene," said Dr Sajjad Ahmed Siddiqui, who also runs a health facility in an underprivileged area.

He said: "Most roads and streets in the city have been badly damaged in rains. This is not only obstructing smooth flow of traffic, but also contributing to the polluted environment."

Physicians like Dr Khatri and Dr Siddiqui operating in slum areas of the city often rely on symptomatic treatment, considering financial constraints of their patients.

According to Dr Siddiqui, prevention in the health sector not only reduces burden on tertiary care hospitals, improves quality of care and public health, but also contributes directly to the economy.

"The bad news is that there is no concept of prevention in our healthcare system. In this area, we should learn from countries like Rwanda — one of the smallest countries in African mainland that saw years' of conflict and the tragedy of 1994 genocide — which has made tremendous progress in improving health status of its population," he said.

Preventive strategies, the experts said, were started at the grass-root level in communities for which it was important to strengthen the primary healthcare system.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 23/09/2020)

### Five persons mauled by stray dog in city

On the eve of World Rabies Day (observed on Sept 28), five people, including two children, were attacked and mauled by a dog one after another in a Clifton locality on Sunday, officials said.

The victims taken to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) were identified as seven-year-old Samar, nine-year-old Karan, 35-year-old Nawaz Khan, 60-year-old Chaman Lal and 70-year-old Rajesh Jai Chand, said Dr Seemi Jamali at the hospital.

They were admitted to the emergency unit of the health facility in the first half of the day.

"All the victims have been bitten mostly on their hands and faces," she said.

"This year so far, we have received some eight patients of rabies. We have treated more than 6,700 such patients over the years. The fresh five patients are receiving due treatment."

Rabies is a highly under-reported disease as most hospitals do not maintain its data.

In many cases, according to experts, patients die before diagnosis could be made as families turn to faith healers.

It is estimated that Karachi alone reports an average 150 cases of dog-bites every day.

Last year, the media reported 24 deaths from rabies, a viral infectious disease, which has emerged as a major health challenge in Sindh.

Almost all victims had been brought from the interior parts of Sindh to Karachi for treatment, indicating unavailability of rabies vaccine in hospitals in those areas.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 28/09/2020)

### **Plasma therapy suspension**

The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan has suspended plasma therapy for Covid-19 patients, even though a report had found this mode of treatment effective. In April, Drap gave its approval for clinical trials of the plasma therapy to save lives of the scary disease. Around 350 patients who had recovered from the disease had voluntarily donated their plasma to the National Institute of Blood Diseases and Bone Marrow Transplantation Karachi, and the clinical trials were conducted at Jinnah Hospital, Karachi and in other parts of the country. The trials, monitored directly from the President House, were carried out for two months. They were completed in August and the report was submitted to Drap, but the latter did not allow the continuation of the trials nor has it so far made the trial results public.

Now donors are justifiably demanding that they be informed about the efficacy of the plasma therapy. They ask if the clinical trials have proven the plasma therapy to be effective in the treatment of coronavirus patients, then it should be applied to save the lives of patients of Covid-19 for which a vaccine has not yet been discovered. According to a report, plasma of convalescent patients had saved 92% of critical coronavirus patients from being put on ventilators; and 80% of other patients had shown prompt recovery after 48 hours. The report had recommended that recovered patients' plasma should be used for the treatment of moderate and serious patients. Patients' recovery varied according to the stages of the disease.

The government should make the trial results public because people participated in the trials believing that the results of this research would help to improve the treatment of patients like them in future. Usually, consent forms also tell them so. However, records the world over show that unpalatable results are frequently left unpublished and are often withheld even from doctors. This might be due to the machinations of vested interests.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 29/09/2020)

### **45-minute daily walk reduces risk of heart diseases**

Speakers at various programmes held here on Tuesday to mark World Heart Day said that simple lifestyle and daily walk for 45 minutes could significantly reduce the risk of heart disease.

These events were held on Ojha campus of the Dow University of Health Sciences, Dow Medical College and Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital.

Heart diseases, according to health experts, are on the rise, affecting 25 million people across the world. In Pakistan, four to five hundred people die of heart disease annually.

"Now, we are seeing a growing number of young people contracting this ailment due to tobacco smoking and consumption of betel leaf and hazardous concoctions such as gutka and mawa etc," said Prof Nawaz Lashari, emphasising on a 45-minute walk daily to significantly reduce the risk of heart diseases.

Dr Ashar Afaq, the DUHS registrar, said coronavirus could be fatal for heart patients. "Hence, it's important to keep a distance of at least six feet from each other, use a face mask and do physical exercise daily. It's our responsibility to guide people to a balanced diet, daily exercise and a simple lifestyle."

He underscored the need for getting physically active in life and said simple steps, such as the use of stairs instead of elevators and eating healthy food, helped normalise high cholesterol and sugar levels.

According to the experts, 20 per cent of people in Pakistan suffered from high blood pressure, 10 per cent from diabetes and 30 per cent from obesity -- the leading cause of heart disease.

A healthy diet, they pointed out, could help protect heart, improve blood pressure and cholesterol, and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

A heart-healthy eating plan should include vegetables and fruit, beans or other legumes, lean meat and fish, low-fat or fat-free dairy products and whole grains.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 30/09/2020)

## Gastrointestinal tract cancers on rise in Karachi, says study

A 10-year study conducted at the Dow University of Health Sciences — which has the largest public sector network of diagnostic centres in the city — has shown that cancers of gastrointestinal tract are on the rise in Karachi, which is found to have the highest number of oral cancer in the country.

The data of the study titled View of Common Cancers in Karachi, Pakistan: 2010-2019 Data from the Dow Registry was released on Thursday following its publication in the Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences.

Prof Mohammad Asif Qureshi led the study with colleagues Prof Saeed Khan and Dr Shaheen Sharafat under the supervision of Prof Mohammad Saeed Qureshi.

The Dow Cancer Registry is part of DUHS department of pathology. The study — which recorded 22,858 cancer cases from 2010 to 2019 — also showed a higher number of women with cancer than men.

Of the total cases, 13,746 (60.1 per cent) were registered in women while 9,112 cases (39.9 per cent) were recorded in men. Breast cancer tops the list of cancers followed by oral cancer and esophageal cancer.

In adult men, cancer of lip and oral cavity was found to be 33.6 per cent, non-melanoma skin cancer 7.2 per cent, cancer of esophagus was 6.8 per cent, cancer of colorectal was 6.7 per cent and cancer of stomach was 4.9 per cent.

In adult women, the prevalence of breast cancer was 53.2 per cent, cancers of lip and oral cavity was 10.4 per cent, cancer of esophagus was 5.3 per cent, cancer of colorectal was 3.3 per cent and non-melanoma skin cancer was 3 per cent.

In children, the percentage of brain cancer was 15.8 per cent, Hodgkin's lymphoma was 14.2 per cent, cancer of colorectal was 8.1 per cent, cancer of endocrine and related organs was 15.3 per cent and non- Hodgkin's lymphoma was 7.8 per cent.

"While comparative analysis of the number of cancer cases over the years was not scope of our study, we did compare our data with other studies conducted in the country. The high number of cancers of oral cavity and gastrointestinal tract can be linked to the growing use of tobacco products and consumption of unhealthy food products," said lead investigator Prof Asif Qureshi.

The spike in breast cancer, he pointed out, was in line with the international disease pattern and might be linked with growing awareness of the disease among women and diagnosis.

According to the report, non-melanoma skin cancers are among the top 10 cancers in Karachi. The reasons for high prevalence of this cancer, it says, could be city's proximity to the equator as compared to other parts of Pakistan or increased production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the city over the past years.

It may be mentioned here that CFCs are a group of (internationally banned) odorless manufactured chemicals causing damage to the Ozone layer. They are used in the manufacturing of aerosol sprays, blowing agents for foams and packing materials, as solvents and refrigerants.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 02/10/2020)

## Govt moves to check virus resurgence in Karachi

The government has tightened pandemic restrictions in Karachi, with the city administration sealing in the recent days multiple commercial entities where coronavirus-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) were ignored. Meanwhile, the lockdown was extended to five neighbourhoods of East district and three union councils (UCs) of Korangi district.

As many as 316 new Covid-19 cases emerged in Sindh on Friday, with 223 of them from Karachi.

According to a statement issued by the Karachi commissioner's office, 61 restaurants, including 29 in Central district, nine in South district, eight in Korangi district, seven in Malir district and four each in East and West district, were sealed on September 30.

Similarly, four marriage halls, including two in Central district and as many in Korangi district, were sealed on the day.

On Thursday, the teams of relevant district administrations sealed three marriage halls in Korangi district and 48 restaurants, including 19 in South district, 13 in East district, eight in Malir district and one each in West and Korangi district.

Furthermore, over a period of just three days, a total of 118 restaurants were sealed across the city.

Moreover, four private schools were closed in South district and three shops were sealed in Central district on Thursday.

Besides, scores of shop, marriage hall, school and restaurant owners were warned against violating pandemic SOPs.

Then on Friday, the East district administration imposed lockdown in five different locations, including Al-Mustafa Apartments in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Askari-IV in Gulistan-e-Johar, Gulistan-e-Johar's block-13, Al-Khaleed Tower on Shaheed-e-Millat Road and a portion of Martin Quarters.

The lockdown was enforced on October 2 at midnight, and will remain in place till October 17.

Besides, a complete lockdown was imposed in UC-1, UC-11 and UC-33 of Korangi district.

Earlier, micro-smart lockdowns were enforced in two localities of West district and as many of South district.

The lockdowns were imposed after relevant deputy commissioners and district health officials identified areas where Covid-19 cases were on the rise, according to health department officials.

Speaking on the matter, Sindh health department spokesperson Meeran Yousuf told The Express Tribune that in some cases, entire families had tested positive for Covid-19.

Saying the citizens had been violating pandemic SOPs of late, she stated that district administrations had been directed to ensure the strict implementation of coronavirus-related restrictions at public places and the health department, too, wanted proper implementation of government orders in this regard.

On Friday, police and district administration officials patrolled markets and streets across the megalopolis, instructing shopkeepers to close businesses within the time set by the government and ensure the strict implementation of SOPs.

In various areas, shopkeepers were witnessed requesting customers to sanitise their hands and distributing free masks before allowing people entry into their shops.

According to a shop owner from Civil Lines, hardly any customers bring their own masks. "We cannot stop them from entering [the shop] and think it best to offer them masks and sanitisers, hoping that they will realise the importance [of using them]," he said.

Meanwhile, challans were issued to the owners of 174 vehicles, in addition imposing a fine on them for violating the SOPs. Of these, authorities took 77 vehicles, including 11 buses and 43 mini buses, into custody.

Plus, a private bank was sealed in Khadda Market, after four of its staff tested positive.

Confirming this, South DC Irshad Sodhar said his teams had been patrolling areas and sealing entities where the SOPs were being violated.

Speaking with regards to screening for Covid-19, he said tests, including drive-through and home testing, were being carried out across the South district on a regular basis.

"When we test more people, we get more positive cases," he remarked.

And if authorities continue regular testing with complete honesty elsewhere in the country, a rise in cases would be observed there too, a senior district health official opined.

"We are not like Punjab and here [in Sindh], we have continued with contact tracing so as to curb the spread of the virus," he added.

According to health department officials, the city's hospitals currently have sufficient space to accommodate Covid-19 patients, even as numbers continue to rise. Officials claim there is enough space even for critically ill patients.  
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 03/10/2020)

### Increased medicine prices

THE government has been widely censured for allowing pharmaceutical companies to increase prices of 94 life-saving drugs by up to 260pc a few days ago. The criticism isn't without justification. A report in this newspaper has quoted some patients as saying that they've either reduced their daily dose of medicines prescribed by their physicians or have been forced to discontinue the treatment altogether as prices shoot up, even though the government has yet to notify the new rates. Could anything be more disturbing than to see people stop treatment of serious ailments, even if it means serious health complications for them and difficulties for their families? Some medical practitioners have gone so far as to accuse the government of giving in to the blackmailing tactics of the pharmaceutical industry. Others have questioned the wisdom of allowing such a hefty increase, claiming that the price of raw material has come down substantially. Still others want the government to look into allegations of transfer pricing by the industry, which lets it move significant parts of its earnings to principals as cost of raw material.

The government's claim that it has allowed the price increase under the 'hardship category' as per the Drugs Pricing Policy of 2018 to end the shortages of several medicines in the market (which forces patients to buy expensive imported alternatives) cannot be disputed. It is also a fact that drug manufacturing is a business for investors; if they don't earn good returns on their investment they will pull their money out and invest in some other business. However, it is the job of the policymakers to find a way to strike a balance between the interests of the pharmaceutical industry and those in need of medication. One solution could be to help the industry bring down its cost of doing business to hold down drug prices. The other could be opening up the market for generic drugs in order to provide cheaper but good-quality medicines to those from the low- and middle-income segments.



(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 03/10/2020)

### 150,000 dog bite cases reported in Sindh this year

As many as 150,000 dog-bite cases were registered at hospitals across the province from January 1 to September 30, data released by the Sindh Health Department revealed on Sunday.

Karachi saw the highest number of dog-bite cases, numbering at 17,800, while Naushero Feroze reported 13,000, Khairpur 12,500, Kashmore 11,400, Dadu 11,300, Qambar-Shahdadkot 9,100, Sanghar 8,000 and Umerkot 7,500.

Of all the cases registered in Karachi, 6,500 were reported at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, 6,000 at Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital, 5,000 at Indus Hospital and 300 at other district hospitals.

The slum areas of Ibrahim Hyderi, Korangi, Surjani Town, North Karachi, New Karachi, Baldia Town, Orangi, Keamari, Mehmoodabad, Liaquatabad, Federal B Area, Sohrab Goth, Orangi and Golimar saw the highest incidence of attacks by stray dogs, with children and elderly persons being the most common victims. Meanwhile, Tharparkar, Hyderabad, Matiari, Tando Muhammad Khan and Sukkur reported fewer cases during this time, according to the health department. A total of 195,761 dog-bite cases were registered in Sindh in 2019.

(By PPI The Express Tribune, 05, 05/10/2020)

### Cancer on the rise

THE findings of a recent study conducted by the Dow University of Health Sciences have revealed that cancer of the gastrointestinal tract is on the rise in Karachi. This might not just be a coincidence, as the study indicates — Karachi is also the city with the highest prevalence of oral cancer in the country. According to researchers, this rise can be attributed to the growing use of tobacco products (one of the main causes of oral cancer) and the consumption of unhealthy foods. The study was based on data collected over several years from 2010 to 2019. The survey revealed that most of the cancer cases (around 60pc) were diagnosed in women as compared to men. The most common cancer among women is breast cancer, followed by oral and then oesophageal cancer, while in men it is oral cancer. The findings of the DUHS survey are not surprising. Research indicates that cancer, often a hereditary malady, is also linked to environmental factors and poor dietary habits, as in the case of oral cancer that affects those who regularly consume tobacco products, paan and betel nut. The increasing incidence of cancer in Pakistan has also been noted by other independent studies carried out in the country. A separate survey by the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences lists cancer as the second leading cause of death — the first being heart disease — in the country. The survey indicates that every year, around 148,000 new cancer cases are reported in Pakistan.

Poor environmental conditions combined with a dilapidated healthcare system and the recent hike in drug prices paint a worrisome picture for the hundreds of thousands of cancer patients in the country. Lack of screening facilities, and difficulty in accessing health services, also hinder treatment. The authorities need to invest in satellite centres of tertiary hospitals to enable screening tests while also ensuring that patients receive the required treatment. It is equally essential to educate the public on the importance of early diagnoses and treatment.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 05/10/2020)

### Helipad at JPMC becomes operational after 20 years

Every second counts when seriously unwell patients or the critically injured need to reach hospital in time. The heavy traffic on our roads, not to mention the state of our roads, often results in terrible tragedy. But things are going to change soon as patients termed critical will soon be reaching the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) via an air ambulance.

The new development has been a dream of JPMC's Executive Director Dr Seemin Jamali.

"It was over 20 years ago when the helipad at JPMC was functional. But by the time I got here, it was no longer in use and there was wild plantation growing all around it," she told Dawn. "Of course, we very much wanted to revive activity there and our administration people were asked to write letters to the relevant authorities and people who could make this happen."

*Air ambulances can now transport the injured from remote areas to the health facility*

And Dr Jamali got her wish over the weekend. She was informed on Saturday that someone wanted to use the hospital's helipad. "Well, it was the chief minister of Sindh who then took off from here in a helicopter on Sunday and also landed back here in the same helo," she said, adding that of course while serving as a landing spot for air ambulances the helipad may also be used for dignitaries.

"It is a time-saving means of commuting, especially during emergencies when the roads tend to get blocked too. During emergencies even ambulances that are there to carry away the injured have to be told to not block the way for other ambulances to pass," she pointed out.

"The first hour after a mishap is the most critical time for saving lives. They must get medical help as quickly as possible and helicopters can do that. They will save lives," she said.

**Navy to use helipad for emergencies**

The day following the CM's using the JPMC helipad, Dr Jamali received correspondence from the Pakistan Navy, who also wanted to use the helipad for their medical emergencies and other missions.

Of course, the hospital had no issues with that. Dr Jamali wrote back to them the same day showing her willingness and welcoming them while also letting the Sindh government and its health department know about it as in going ahead with the endeavour, they will be looking for their permission and guidance too.

"The Sindh government has always been extra kind in its help to us. They let us have whatever facility or equipment is needed for the good of the patients," she said.

"The Navy," Dr Jamali informed, "will soon be carrying out practice drills at the helipad during both daytime and after dark with other emergency vehicles including ambulances and fire tenders. And if things go smoothly, soon we will have patients being flown in from far-flung areas such as Sindh's interior and Balochistan as well," she said.

But in order for that to happen they would be needing private air ambulance services.

"It is an expensive way to commute but it is not more expensive than life. We are a poor hospital that wants to make a difference and where there is a will, there is a way," she smiled, adding that besides having patients come in through other ambulance services they will also have the armed forces' helicopters in case of a mass emergency, disaster or calamity in which the injured need to be quickly evacuated and brought over to a medical facility such as the JPMC.

The hospital also has the clearance and support of the Civil Aviation Authority in this new endeavour.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 07/10/2020)

**15,000 families left without govt healthcare in Karachi**

A three room Basic Health Unit (BHU) established in Karachi's West district in 1985 has been shut for the past seven years. It was the only government health facility catering to over a dozen villages and residential areas.

Constructed on two-acres of land donated by the villagers of Bhudan Shah or Bhudni Goth, the hospital had been built to serve area residents who otherwise had to travel miles for any health-related situation.

To facilitate the staff and doctors, living quarters and a bungalow were built but were later occupied by Lyari-based criminals.

Today the three-room facility serves as a storage room for a newly-constructed school nearby while the residential building sits in ruin.

"This was the only facility here, facilitating hundreds of patients daily," said Abdullah Shah, a local resident. "It has been closed since 2013. There is no other government hospital in the area."

Patients from villages including Mann, Mindhyari, Allah Bitto, Lal Bakhar, Saun Lakhi, Moosa Goth, Hawkes Bay and others used to visit the hospital.

But now, according to Ameen Khaskheli, a social activist and area resident, they are forced either to travel the distance for every minor or major health concern, or shell out money they can ill-afford to private health facilities.

In case of emergencies, a majority of the residents living in the Mauripur area and around Bhudni Goth transport their seriously ill patients to Lyari General Hospital, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre or Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital.

"Seriously ill patients and pregnant women [can] hardly bear the pain while traveling to these tertiary care hospitals," Khaskheli said, pointing out the dilapidated condition of Mauripur Road from Javed Bahri to Gulbai.

At a rough estimate, over 15,000 households live in Bhudni Goth while thousands more live in nearby areas. The village has three major graveyards, including one for Christians and another for Hindus.

"At least we have a facility for our dead," said Shah wryly, adding that the closure of the government hospital had opened the door for quacks to emerge in the area. "There is no other option," he added. "Closing a hospital permanently is like snatching a basic right from citizens."

Nazar Muhammad Bhand, who also lives in the area, narrated that the residential quarters were occupied by criminals. "This compelled hospital staff to leave the premises permanently, closing the facility's doors forever," he explained.

Recounting the hospital's foundation, he told *The Express Tribune* that the facility was established to accommodate voters during the general elections in early 1980s. "Not a single such facility has been provided to the people of these old areas [since then]," he complained.

The villagers informed *The Express Tribune* that some district health officials had visited the BHU a couple of months ago. "They promised us the hospital will be restored, but once they left, they never looked back," smiled Bhand.

Officials from the Sindh health department, meanwhile, seem unaware of the situation, telling *The Express Tribune* that they did not know why the hospital has been shut for the past seven years.

However, Dr Ateeq-ur-Rehman Qureshi, the additional DHO of West district, while speaking to *The Express Tribune*, said the hospital had been demolished. "But we will renovate it," he promised. "This facility needs to be upgraded and we will soon restore it."

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 05, 08/10/2020)

### Doctors demand restoration of PMDC

The Young Doctors Association staged a protest against the Pakistan Medical Commission on Friday outside Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre's Najamuddin Auditorium. The protesting doctors demanded that the PMC bill be revoked and the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) be restored.

According to the protestors, the PMC will create difficulties for doctors and new medical graduates while allowing private medical colleges to do as they wish. This was why the opposition parties boycotted the bill, claimed the doctors.

They opined that the bill was against basic human rights and would ruin the standard of medical education in Pakistan.

If the PMDC is not restored, the doctors will face severe inconvenience, they claimed, reiterating their demand for it to be nullified. "It is the job of parliamentarians to legislate but they were irresponsible when they approved the PMC bill," the protestors added.

According to YDA Sindh vice-president Waris Ali, it was indicative of the federal government's incompetence that it secretly dissolved the PMDC and enforced the PMC bill.

"It is good that a new bill has been passed but its clauses and laws should be made clear," he stated. "If testing is to be done through the PMC then the medical syllabus across the country should be uniform and admissions should be made under an open merit system," he maintained, adding that the relevant authorities should take action against private institutions that do what they want to.

Meanwhile, YDA chairperson Dr Omer Sultan condemned the decision to dissolve the PMDC and rejected the PMC bill, which he opined was destructive for the future of medical students and professionals.

Medical graduates would be subjected to the National Licensing Exam after studying and appearing in exams for five years, he said, asking how the PMC bill could be enforced again when the court has nullified it.

"To produce good doctors, the focus should be on faculties, quality of education and a uniform examination policy," he said, as he urged medical students to join the YDA's protest for a better future.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 10/10/2020)

### High alert imposed in KMC-run hospitals after heatwave forecast

A high alert was imposed on Monday at all the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC)-run hospitals and rescue 1122 service on the directives of Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Ali Shallwani in the wake of a heatwave forecast by the Pakistan Meteorological Department.

Official sources said that all departments of the KMC's medical and health services were asked to remain on alert to cope with any untoward situation. All officials concerned and staffers were also asked to remain on duty round the clock, they added.

The sources said the focal persons of the hospitals were directed to make foolproof arrangements while the officials concerned were asked to ensure implementation of the directives in letter and spirit.

The city municipal administration made public details of heatstroke centres established at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Sobhraj Maternity Hospital, Gizri Maternity Hospital, Landhi Medical Complex, Sarfaraz Rafeequi Shaheed Hospital, Primary Healthcare Centre Lyari, Gazdarabad General Hospital, Leprosy Hospital Manghopir, Homeopathic Hospital Nazimabad, Cardiac Centre Shah Faisal, Cardiac Centre Landhi, Karachi Institute of Kidney Diseases and Karachi Institute of Health Heart Diseases.

Phone numbers of the focal persons of those centres have also been issued.

#### Health advisory

The medical and health services department issued an advisory for people, asking them to adopt precautionary measures. The citizens were asked to drink water and ORS to prevent dehydration.

The people were also asked to avoid going out if not necessary and wear caps while working or in the open. "The people should avoid going out from 9am to 5pm and use umbrellas or remain in shelter if it is necessary to go out," the advisory read.

It asked diabetic and blood pressure patients to adopt special preventive measures. The advisory asked the citizens to approach their nearest heatstroke centre in case of any emergency.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 13/10/2020)

### Parents seek help for son suffering from heart disease, haemophilia

Parents of an infant suffering from congenital disorders sought philanthropists' help for treatment on Tuesday at a presser organised by Haemophilia Welfare Society (HWS) at its premises.

"My 18-month-old son was born with a heart disease. Later, within a few months, we came to know that he also suffers from haemophilia," said Saman Afif, a resident of Gulistan-i-Jauhar, while addressing the press briefing along with her husband Afif Ahmed.

The family had spent whatever money they had with them on treatment, she added.

The parents appealed to philanthropists to help save their only son.

President HWS Raheel Ahmed and haematologist Dr Munira Burhani told journalists that the heart disease the child suffered from was tetralogy of Fallot, a birth defect that affected normal blood flow through the heart.

*'The complete treatment will cost around Rs12.5m'*

"This happens when a baby's heart does not form correctly as the baby grows and develops in the mother's womb during pregnancy," they explained.

The child, they said, had four heart defects and would be operated upon in three stages in four years.

"The complete treatment will cost around Rs12.5 million," said Raheel Ahmed, adding that the society would provide anti-haemophilia Factor 9 injections costing about Rs2m.

"It is not possible to manage the amount required for treatment without philanthropists' assistance."

To a question, doctors said haemophilia was mostly an inherited genetic disorder that impaired the body's ability to make blood clots, a process needed to stop bleeding. This resulted in bleeding for a longer time after an injury, easy bruising and an increased risk of bleeding inside joints or the brain.

Dr Munira Burhani said the child needed to be admitted to a hospital where all relevant departments were available for treatment during the operation.

It would be a big challenge to stop bleeding after surgery, she said in reply to a question.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 14/10/2020)

### PMA doctors guide citizens on precautions during heatwave

As the city remains in the grips of an intense heat wave, the Pakistan Medical Association has cautioned citizens from exposing themselves to the sun during peak heat hours. The doctors' association issued an advisory on Tuesday guiding citizens in terms of first aid for heat related ailments and precautionary measures.



As predicted by the Pakistan Meteorological Department, the metropolis and other areas in the province have witnessed sweltering weather in the past two days. The heatwave is likely to persist throughout the week with mercury expected to hit as high as 42 degrees Celsius.

Amid the sizzling heat, experts have advised citizens to wear loose, lightweight clothing, avoid the sun during peak hours - around 11am to 4pm - cover the head with a cap or a wet cloth when stepping out, remain in shade as much as possible and, most importantly, drink plenty of water.

PMA President Dr Ikrum Ahmed Tunio and Secretary-General Dr SM Qaiser Sajjad advised citizens to practice extra caution with regards to children and the elderly during the heatwave as low immunity can make them more susceptible to its effects.

They recommended eating light home-cooked meals and to avoid fried items like rolls, samosas and pakoray. They also reminded citizens to always use boiled water for cooking and drinking purposes.

The PMA doctors also urged the government to direct K-Electric to avoid load-shedding during these days of scorching heat and the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board ensure continuous water supply.

#### **Symptoms, first aid**

The senior doctors listed out the systems of heatstroke which include itching, weakness, headache, rapid pulse, low blood pressure, nausea and vomiting, muscular pains and losing consciousness.

If you or someone near you experiences these symptoms, move the patient to a place with shade, check the patient's breathing and give them clean drinking water, said the doctors.

But in case the patient is unconscious, they warned, do not put water or any edibles in their mouth. Instead cool their body with a cold sponge or by spraying cold water, said the doctors. Monitor their pulse and blood pressure, and shift them to the hospital urgently.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 14/10/2020)

### **Sindh restrained from conducting medical, dental admission**

The Sindh High Court on Friday restrained the provincial authorities from holding the admission test for medical and dental universities and colleges in the province scheduled to be held on Sunday amid a conflict of approach between the federal and provincial authorities over the admission policy.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the federal and provincial authorities, cited as respondents, to file comments within five days in two petitions and also issued notices to the federal and provincial law officers for Oct 22.

The first petition was filed by five public medical and health universities of the province against the Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC) and sought permission to allow the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) to be conducted on Oct 18.

Some pre-medical students also moved the SHC against the admission test scheduled to be held on Sunday and sought a restraining order against it.

When both the petitions came up for hearing before the bench on Friday, the lawyer for universities, Sarmad Hani, submitted that Section 18 of the recently enacted Pakistan Medical Commission Act, 2020 was ultra vires to the Constitution and the PMC had no right to regulate the entry test nor had any jurisdiction to stop the entry test being conducted by the Peoples University of Medical and Health Sciences for Women, Nawabshah on Sunday.

*SHC issues notices to federal, provincial law officers for 22<sup>nd</sup>*

He further argued that the PMC Admission Regulations, 2020-2021 framed by the council under the act had been issued without any lawful authority and had no legal effect and maintained that the notification issued on Sept 24 by the PMC for withholding the admission process in the province was ultra vires to Section 18 of the 2020 Act.

The counsel sought permission to allow the university in question to continue the admission process and the entry test as per schedule and also argued that after promulgation of 18th Amendment, education had become a provincial subject.

On the other hand, the lawyer for the students, Jibran Nasir, argued that the entry test being conducted by the provincial admission committee on Oct 18 as per the Pakistan Medical & Dental Council Admissions Regulations, 2020 was without any lawful authority since these regulations were framed pursuant to the Pakistan Medical & Dental Council Ordinance, 1962 which had already been repealed by the PMC Act.

The lawyer for the PMC submitted that the comments would be filed within three days while similar statements made by the deputy attorney general and additional advocate general.

The bench observed that the bone of contention was the alleged vires of Section 18 of the PMC Act and said that admittedly, the PMC Act had been notified on Sept 24 and the first petition to challenge the law had been filed on Oct 10 and the entry test was scheduled to be convened on Sunday.

However, fact remained that the PMDC Ordinance had been repealed and MBBS and BDS (Admissions, Examinations, House Job or Internship) Regulations, 2020 were also repealed; though counsel for universities argued that the regulations of 2020 were protected despite repealing the parent law, it added.

The bench further said it was a well-settled exposition of law that the validly legislated law remained in field unless it was struck down but the operation of law could not be suspended as an interim measure.

"In 2020 Act, National Medical Authority has been established to conduct a single admissions test being a mandatory requirement for all students seeking admission to medical or dental under-graduate programs anywhere in Pakistan with a further rider that no student shall be awarded a medical or dental degree in Pakistan who has not passed the MDCAT (Medical and Dental College Admission Test) prior to obtaining admission in a medical or dental college in Pakistan. The letters of law is clear that admitting university (petitioner No. 1) cannot conduct any entry test under the new Law," it added.

The bench observed that the grounds raised by the lawyer for universities with regard to the vires of the law required attention and consideration. But if at this stage the entry test was allowed to be conducted by admitting university, it would have serious repercussions and also create multiplicity of proceedings, hardship and uncertainty and therefore in order to protect and safeguard the interest of all such students it would be in the interest of justice to postpone the entry test rather than allowing it on Oct 18.

“However as an interim measure, the admitting university shall postpone/defer the entry test which is scheduled to be conducted on 18.10.2020 till further orders of this court and all applicants shall be notified through print and electronic media as well as website of NTS,” it concluded.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 17/10/2020)

### **JPMC staff holds protest, demands implementation of SC**

The joint action committee of the nursing staff, paramedics and members of Doctor’s Association representing the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) held a demonstration on Saturday, demanding implementation of the Supreme Court’s decision announced in Jan, 2019.

It’s the second protest by the staff within two weeks.

The protesters called upon the federal government to implement the decision and end ‘ad-hocism’ at the JPMC prevailing over a decade and put the institution back on track.

The association clarified that their demands were not in discord with what the Grand Health Alliance of Sindh was asking for. However, the matter regarding doctors’ transfer at the JPMC and the National Institute of Health (NICH) was a more complicated matter.

“Therefore, no such action should be taken till the legal status of JPMC and its employees is settled and their due rights given,” said Dr Naeem Khan, president of the association.

The delay in implementing the court’s decision was an extreme violation of employees’ fundamental rights, it was claimed. Therefore, the matter must be resolved on an urgent basis, he added.

According to the association, over a thousand posts have fallen vacant over a decade following the retirement of various staff members that has seriously affected the functioning of the hospital. Moreover, promotions pending for a prolonged period have created a lot of frustration among the serving staff.

The protestors appealed to the prime minister to uphold the rule of law and honour the verdict of the apex court. They also called upon the Supreme Court to get its decision implemented otherwise the public would lose faith in the justice system.

It may be recalled that the JPMC, along with National Institute of Child Health (NICH) and National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), have been facing administrative uncertainty since 2011 when their employees sought the Sindh High Court’s intervention against the likely devolution of these institutions to the provincial government under the 18th Amendment.

The matter remained pending till 2016 when the court ordered that the control of these hospitals would remain with the federal government. This judgment, however, was suspended by the Supreme Court the same year on an appeal filed by the Sindh government.

In Jan 2019, the court rejected the plea of the Sindh government and ordered the federal government to take control of the JPMC, the NICH in Karachi and Sheikh Zayed Postgraduate Medical Institute in Lahore. Moreover, the court had stipulated a 90-day period for the transition.

The federal government, however, is yet to implement this order. The delay, according to media reports, has been due to the federal government’s consideration to hand over the hospitals to the provincial governments. This couldn’t happen because of strained relations between the two governments.

Last year, JPMC and NICVD employees filed a contempt of court petition against the federation in the Supreme Court and the federation agreed to implement the judgement in six weeks and gave an undertaking in writing to the court, but did not implement it.

“The federal cabinet on 3rd March 2020 in complete disregard of the Constitution refused again to obey the judgement of the court in a contemptuous way perhaps to undermine the judiciary. Not only that the federal secretary Ministry of National Health Services was summarily removed from the post on 4th March for pleading implementation of Supreme Court judgement,” says a letter written this year by JPMC employees to the chief justice.

The employees have recently re-submitted their contempt of court petition whose hearing is yet to take place.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 18/10/2020)

### **Hypertension increases risk of heart diseases, death: experts**

There is an urgent need to create public awareness about the serious health risks posed by hypertension — also known as high blood pressure.

This medical condition is getting very common these days and patients often report at hospitals when they have already developed a disease, according to the experts speaking at an event held at the Dow Medical College here on Monday.

The event, jointly organised by the cardiology department of the Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK) and the Pakistan Hypertension League (PHL) was held in connection with World Hypertension Day.

*Ways to control blood pressure to avoid the risk suggested as world observes hypertension day*

Starting off with this year's theme of World Hypertension Day, Prof Nawaz Lashari, head of the cardiology department, said it's about measuring and controlling blood pressure that helped people live a healthy longer life.

#### **'A silent killer'**

"There are risk factors that can be reduced without the use of medication, for instance low consumption of salt and sugar, having a balanced diet, daily exercise and less stressful life," he said, adding that high blood pressure was a silent killer which could seriously damage various body organs including kidney and eyes.

Prof Noor Mohammad Soomro, the medical superintendent of the CHK, spoke about the facilities the hospital offered to heart patients who came from far-flung areas of the province and said the facility tried its best to help poor families.

Prof Ishaq representing the Pakistan Hypertension League said that for the first time in 2005 he felt that high blood pressure was taking the form of an epidemic.

"There is an urgent need for public awareness. There is an acute lack of awareness and neglect about this condition, which is a big risk factor for other diseases including heart disease and diabetes," he said.

A patient with high blood pressure, he said, had to take regular medication otherwise he could end up risking his life.

"Hypertension can lead to severe health complications and increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and sometimes death. Changes in dietary practices and lifestyle can help minimise its risk factors," he said.

Prof Abdul Rashid, also representing the PHL, said it's important for hypertensive patients especially those with other complications to closely monitor their blood pressure. Even low blood pressure should be treated, which could be a precursor to a major disease, if accompanied by high blood pressure.

Assistant Prof Ghulam Abbas, Dr Zaryab Ahmed and Dr Faisal Ahmed also spoke.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 20/10/2020)

### **'Hypertension is a silent killer'**

Around 20 per cent people worldwide suffer from high blood pressure, which is a silent killer, according to experts speaking at Dow Medical College's Arag Auditorium on Monday.

The seminar was organised in collaboration with Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital's cardiology department and the Pakistan Hypertension League (PHL) to mark world hypertension day, which is typically observed on May 17 but was postponed to October 17 this year given the coronavirus pandemic.

The motto this year was 'measure your blood pressure, control it and live longer,' said civil hospital's Cardiology Department Head Professor Nawaz Lashari.

The estimated percentage of people afflicted with hypertension does not include those who inherit the disease, clarified the speakers indicating that actual figures would be higher. The speakers noted that the disease can affect functions of various organs and cause life-long ailments.

Heart patients visit civil hospital in Karachi from all areas of the province for free of charge treatment, said Prof Noor Mohammad Soomro, a medical superintendent at the facility. A cardiology ward worth Rs890m will be set up soon with state of the art equipment, he announced.

According to PHL General-Secretary Prof Ishaq, this is the first time since 2005 that there appears to be an epidemic of high blood pressure. There is an urgent need for public awareness as due to lack of education and attitudes of neglect towards health high blood pressure may go unchecked which can lead to other diseases, he noted.

He urged doctors to take the time to listen to their patients as it would provide them relief. He also warned hypertension patients to not be irregular with their medication as that can cause major complications.

Dr Faisal Ahmed, however, observed that hypertension can also be controlled without medication. But, he added, it is important to monitor blood pressure at home using two readings daily at least - 80 to 120mg/dl is the normal range depending on age group, he said. He advised no smoking and a healthy diet with less fried foods and controlled salt consumption.

The speakers also advised patients to minimise stress as much as possible and surround themselves with loved ones. Can live longer with love, they said.

Prof Abdul Rashid of PHL and Dr Zaryab Ahmed also emphasised on regular monitoring of blood pressure.

That is the only way to prevent it, said Prof Rashid, adding that low blood pressure should also be treated as it may be a precursor to some other disease.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 21/10/2020)

### **'50,000 women die of breast cancer in Pakistan every year**

An estimated 50,000 women die of breast cancer every year in Pakistan — which has the highest rate of this cancer in Asia and reports 90,000 new cases of the disease annually, shared an expert at a seminar held at Karachi University (KU) on Wednesday. The university had organised the event in collaboration with the Pink Pakistan Trust (PPT).

“There has been a 30 per cent reduction in breast cancer cases worldwide due to increased public awareness and early detection. In Pakistan and some other countries in Asia, however, the disease is rapidly growing, mainly due to lack of awareness and cancer diagnostic facilities,” said Dr Zubaida Qazi, the founder and president of PPT.

At some stage of life, one in nine women in Pakistan develops breast cancer, she added.

According to her, women constitute country's 49pc population. Of them, three million women aged 40 to 45 are more vulnerable to the disease.

“Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in women after skin cancer. In Pakistan, we are seeing even young women presenting with an advanced stage breast cancer, which has a negative effect on prognosis,” she explained, while sharing data of WHO and other organisations about the number of breast cancer cases in Pakistan.

#### **Other cancers in women**

Dr Qazi also raised concern about the growing incidence of other types of cancers in Pakistani women and emphasised the need for awareness and setting up facilities for cancer diagnosis and treatment.

“We are also seeing cases of cervical, ovarian and uterine cancers in both urban and rural women. Unfortunately, there is an acute shortage of screening centres in Pakistan to diagnose various types of cancers,” she said, adding that family history of the disease was a major risk factor for breast cancer.

In her speech, Sindh Minister for Women's Development Syeda Shehla Raza underscored the need for public awareness, urging families to take breast cancer awareness campaign seriously.

She advised women to get their tests done periodically as the disease could be effectively controlled only with timely diagnosis.

“We have to play our part collectively in raising awareness about breast cancer. Otherwise, we will not be able to overcome these public health challenges,” she said, urging affected women not to feel ashamed of disease's signs and symptoms and seek immediate medical care.

KU acting Vice Chancellor Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi highlighted the role universities could play in public health.

Dr Fariya Usman of PPT, Dr Kausar Abbas of Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and Dr Sadaf Nasir of Liaquat National Hospital also spoke.

Earlier, the minister along with KU VC and other guests inaugurated breast cancer awareness centre on the campus.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 22/10/2020)

### **Hospital accused of violating Amal Umer Act**

The families of persons injured in the bomb blast near Maskan Chowrangi on Wednesday have accused the administration of a private hospital where victims were shifted of asking for advanced payments for treatment, in violation of the Sindh Injured Persons Compulsory Medical Treatment (Amal Umer) Act, 2019.

Under the law, all hospitals are bound to provide compulsory medical treatment to injured persons immediately, without demanding any payment.

According to the victims' families, the hospital's management delayed the provision of treatment, demanding advance payments prior to administering the required treatment.

However, treatment was started after Sindh health secretary Dr Kazim Jatoi and Sindh health department director Dr Nadeem Sheikh reached the hospital and reminded the management that the expenses for the treatment were to borne by the provincial government.



Later, Dr Sheikh told The Express Tribune that he would be monitoring the blast victims' treatment.

However, the Patel Hospital denied the accusations, claiming them to be false, while responding to the allegations levelled against them in a statement.

"We categorically state that all patients were treated without any of them being asked for any kind of payment. This includes all the tests and CT scanning as well as multiple and complex surgical procedures," the statement read.

The hospital further claimed that "all the emergencies were dealt with very swiftly", and that "a detailed press conference will held tomorrow (today)".

#### **The Amal Umer Act**

The Sindh Assembly had promulgated the legislation in question for providing medical aid and treatment to any injured person before the completion of medico-legal formalities.

It was called for after 10-year-old Amal Umer was killed by a stray bullet during a police shootout with robbers in August, 2018. Umer later died due to the alleged negligence of the hospital to which she was rushed.

As per the law, hospitals are bound to provide compulsory treatment to injured persons on a priority basis.

"No hospital or doctor shall demand any payment for providing compulsory medical treatment or other such medical assistance from victim, if he or she is unable to make payment. The cost of compulsory medical treatment shall be borne by the government," the law states, adding that the injured persons are to be shifted to a government hospital immediately after their condition stabilises. "If he or she chooses, they may remain in the private hospital subject to paying the charges of the hospital," one of the clauses of the Act reads.

Persons or hospitals violating this law are to be imprisoned for three years or more, face a fine not be less than Rs500,000, or both.

(By Tufail Ahmed The Express Tribune, 04, 22/10/2020)

### **World Polio Day**

WHILE Pakistan has been relatively luckier than most countries in preventing a high Covid-19 infection rate and death toll, the polio monster — which has been vanquished everywhere except in Pakistan and Afghanistan — has continued to cripple youngsters. As warnings are issued about a second wave of coronavirus infections, the fact that some 80 polio cases have been reported this year alone has slipped through the cracks. Today, as World Polio Day is observed by an international community that, for the most part, has rid itself of the disease, considerable introspection is required at our end. It is clear that the incidence of polio is not only rising, but that it is doing so with a vengeance.

The alarm was also raised by the global polio watchdog in its last assessment in August, when it warned that cases of both wild and vaccine-derived poliovirus were going to rise steeply in the country. Though the authorities might blame this on the ongoing pandemic, the Independent Monitoring Board report and other evidence indicate that problems began way before the pandemic struck, though the more recent emergency did exacerbate matters and put every other health issue on the back-burner. The IMB report has questioned the structural and technical capabilities of the country's polio programme, and identified negligence in key areas, for instance, failing to appoint doctors to spearhead the polio response in eight super-high risk union councils of Karachi. However, despite all its problems, the polio programme proved to be useful in controlling the spread of Covid-19 as the vast network of community health workers was utilised for contact tracing. Vaccination campaigns resumed in July after a hiatus of four months, but full resumption of anti-polio efforts will take time and some rethinking on the part of the authorities. A workable solution is required to synergise and expand the existing community health network to include local doctors to combat Covid-19 and polio — both highly communicable illnesses — at the same time and not at the cost of the other.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 24/10/2020)

### **Gadap suffers as only hospital barely functional**

When the 50-bed Hospital was inaugurated in Gadap Town on March 30, 2018, the residents in surrounding areas rejoiced. But the state-of-art building, which promised a much awaited health facility in the area, barely receives 70 patients a day.

"The hospital is open for only five hours in the morning," said an employee speaking on the condition of anonymity. "At least it's functioning," he added with a smile.

With no transport and ambulance services in the area, the people of Gadap Town and its adjacent villages have to travel miles to get medical treatment.

The 50-bed hospital is considered a blessing for people living in remote areas. "This is the only hospital, not only for people of Gadap city and adjacent areas, but also for people living on hilly areas," said a resident, Maqbool Ahmed.

Residents from various areas such as Mureed Goth, Haji Goth, Hussain Baloch Goth, Mendan Goth, Pathan Goth, Agaro Khaskheli Goth, Rustan Baloch Goth, Soomar Goth, Rahu Gohram Goth and others as well as Lasbella district [Balochistan] and Dadu district also visit the hospital.

Despite being part of the metropolis, the rural areas of the city lack basic health facilities. "An ill person has to hire a taxi in case of emergency," said Ahmed. Due to the lack of public transport, the people of Gadap Town suffer mentally and financially, he lamented. "For simple treatment[s], they need at least Rs2,000 for transportation," he told, adding that even in case of emergency there is not a single ambulance that can be found.

The health facility does have an ambulance but it is not available for the residents. "There is an ambulance but [it is] currently in use of the head of the hospital," disclosed an employee of the hospital. He said that patients were not being shifted to the city's major hospital in emergency cases either.

"People of Gadap lack all basic facilities," commented Ghulam Qadir Kalmati, an elder of the area. "We have scattered population and we live near an international city but are deprived of a better healthcare system," he added.

Several attempts were made to contact the Medical Superintendent of the 50-bed hospital Dr Hussain Bux for comments but he was not available.

"Malir district is the most underdeveloped district of Sindh province," said HANDS Chief Executive Officer Dr Shaikh Tanveer. "Schools and hospitals have not been developed up to the standard," he added. "People of this district are very poor."

Dr Tanveer said that although the provincial government spent a major chunk of its budget on the health sector, over 30 government hospitals were handed over to his organisation under public private partnership. "We are trying our best to provide health facilities to the people of Malir," he added.

"I feel the Gadap hospital will be handed over to a private organisation," commented an employee of the hospital. "Government officials are not willing to work properly," he added, saying least attention was being given to the hospital's infrastructure.

The provincial health minister's office was also approached for the current situation of the hospital but the official did not provide data despite repeated requests.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 24/10/2020)

### **Gadap hospital**

Agovernment hospital, with a swanky building, started functioning in Gadap Town of Karachi in March 2018, but despite the passage of more than two years the 50-bed healthcare facility opens only for five hours in the morning and tends to hardly 70 patients a day. "At least it is functioning," an employee said with a wry smile. Shifting of patients in need of emergency care to city hospitals is delayed for want of ambulance near the hospital situated in an urban rural area much distant from the main city. The hospital has only one ambulance which is now reportedly in use of the hospital's medical superintendent.

This is the state of affairs at a hospital visited by patients from many villages and also from as far away as Dadu district and Lasbela district of Balochistan. Residents of the area are poor and few health facilities are available to them. Even for treatment of ordinary ailments they have to visit hospitals in Karachi city. For lack of ambulance services and public transport, they have to hire taxi cabs for Rs2,000 which is quite a big amount for people with limited means. People felt great relief when the hospital close to their villages began functioning, but this relief proved short-lived as the hospital is serving them only partially.

Gadap Town is situated in Malir district where schools and hospitals are poorly funded and poorly managed. Now more than 30 public-sector hospitals are being run under public-private partnership with a view to improving facilities at these hospitals. As government officials are reportedly unwilling to work, it looks probable that this hospital would soon be handed over to a private organisation. Officials of the provincial health department are evading probing questions from journalists. The hospital's infrastructure is in a state of neglect. We should not be very alarmed as now a great many things are called hospitals and schools which were not called hospitals and schools before.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 25/10/2020)

### **ASH, KMDC doctors take to streets**

The young doctors, postgraduate trainees and house officers of Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) and Karachi Medical and Dental College staged a demonstration outside the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's office on Tuesday, protesting the non-payment of stipends and salaries, overdue increments and non-provision of other allowances.

Gathered on the call of the Young Doctors Association (YDA), the protesters shouted slogans and criticised the KMC. The carried placards emblazoned with slogans like 'We want salary', 'Unpaid for nine months' and 'Salary do, salary do' [Pay salary, pay salary].

"We are suffering at the hands of KMC," decried YDA ASH chapter president Dr Yusra on the occasion. "Postgraduate trainees and house officers [at ASH] have not been paid stipends for the last nine months and no increment has been made in the stipends [for long], even after the Sindh government released funds for the purpose," she added.

Another protesting doctor, Dr Farjad complained that doctors at ASH had not been paid Covid-19 health risk allowance so far. Besides, he said there were no facilities for conducting ultrasounds, computerised tomography (CT) scans and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the emergency ward of ASH, the third largest tertiary care hospital in Karachi.

He said the hospital's doctors had written multiple applications to the medical superintendent and director of ASH, Karachi commissioner and the city's mayor, apprising them of the problems. Confirming that ASH's doctors had held a meeting with Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Shallwani on the matter few days ago, he complained that no measures had been taken so far to address the issues.

"We demand from the KMC to clear the backlog of postgraduate trainees and house officers' stipends, give increments and issue the health risk allowance," the doctor said.

The Sindh government had announced a Covid-19 risk allowance for doctors, nurses and paramedics working in coronavirus wards in June this year. It was revoked earlier this month, but was restored after health workers protested the move.

According to the protesters, their salaries and stipends were withheld for "political reasons." They said they would not resume work until paid stipends and salaries.

Later, they surrounded Karachi administrator Iftikhar Shallwani's car, barring him from entering his office. Yet, the administrator managed to evade them and entered the building.

Following this, KMC officials closed the KMB building's doors.

At this, the protesters blocked MA Jinnah Road, blocking the avenue and causing inconvenience to commuters.

They only dispersed after municipal commissioner Ammar Zaidi negotiated with doctors leading the demonstration. The commissioner assured the doctors that their salaries and stipends would be paid within a week.

The doctors, however, maintain that they would again take to the streets if the promised remained unfulfilled.

With additional input from APP  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 28/10/2020)

### **'Smoking, diabetes, hypertension increase stroke risk in Covid patients'**

An estimated 1,000 people have major or minor strokes in Pakistan. Of them, 400 die the same day while around 200 or 250 suffer disability for life.

This was shared by senior neurologists at a press conference held on Tuesday in connection with World Stroke Day at the Karachi Press Club.

The event was organised by Pakistan Stroke Society (PSS) in collaboration with Neurology Awareness and Research Foundation (NARF), Pakistan Islamic Medical Association and PharmEvo, a local pharmaceutical firm.

According to experts, Covid-19 has emerged as a serious risk factor for stroke and it has increased the occurrence of stroke across the world.

Now, they pointed out, smokers and patients with diabetes and hypertension were more at risk of having stroke, if they contracted coronavirus, calling upon the government to launch stroke prevention programmes.

"There is an urgent need to have a national stroke treatment centre and a stroke research institute in Karachi," said president of NARF Prof Muhammad Wasey.

He said hardly 250 out of 100,000 people reportedly had a stroke in Pakistan in 2005.

General secretary of PSS Dr Ravi Shankar said a stroke was an emergency and timely proper intervention could save life.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 28/10/2020)

### **City records 900 dengue cases in a month**

A rapid increase in the number of dengue cases was observed in the city in the past month, with 900 cases being reported in October alone.

As many as 2,000 dengue cases have been reported in Sindh in the current year thus far and 975 cases were reported in the previous month, of which 927 were in Karachi.

The city's East district reported the highest number of dengue cases, followed by the South and Central districts.

Health officials have advised citizens to practice caution. Elaborating on the situation, Dengue Control Programme manager Dr Iqbal Memon told The Express Tribune that a rapid increase in the spread of dengue was noted in the last two weeks of October.

The worst affected areas in the city include Gulshan-e-Iqbal and Jamshed Town in the East district, he disclosed, adding that in other districts, North Nazimabad is among the localities with a higher cluster of cases.

Stagnant water still remaining in several areas of the city after the monsoon rains is one reason attributed to the spike in dengue cases. Accumulated water serves as a breeding ground for dengue mosquitos.

According to Memon, an increase in the dengue virus is noted across the world in the months of September, October and November, and not just in Pakistan.

The situation here is still better than before, he maintained, adding that in October 2019, around 6,000 were reported but in the current year it was 1,000 in the same month.

According to Memon, aerial spraying is being carried out in areas with a higher number of cases and chemicals are being added in places with accumulated water. Efforts are also being made to increase public awareness.

(By Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 03/11/2020)

### **Civil society comes out in support of NICVD over NAB raid**

Representatives of civil society organisations, trade unions and the Pakistan Medical Association have expressed their concerns over last week's raid carried out by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD).

Speaking at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club on Monday, they said that the NICVD was providing unique round-the-clock services of primary angiography and angioplasty and other heart ailments to common people free of cost.

The hospital, in the last many years, has established itself as one of the best public-sector facilities not only in Sindh, where it has a network of 28 facilities, but in the entire country, too, with highly qualified doctors and other staff.

Therefore, targeting such a health facility is beyond comprehension and deserves strong condemnation, they felt.

*Trade unionists, rights activists and health experts demand an inquiry against the anti-graft watchdog for raiding hospital*

"The NICVD gets funds from the government of Sindh but it is an autonomous body governed by a governing body and is fully independent in its functioning. No formal corruption charges have ever been proved against the facility and the public in general is witness of the best services provided. It is ironic then that the bureau, instead of conducting an inquiry against the real culprits, chose to target a hospital with good reputation. Nobody here buys these charges or allegations against it," said Karamat Ali, executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER).

#### **Raid termed illegal**

"The way NAB raided the hospital where hundreds of heart patients were under treatment is illogical, illegal, and immoral and in disregard to all basic principles and values. This action resulted in halting the services by the hospital staff in protest and created panic among the patients and their [attendants]. NAB is liable to be sued for damages by hospital staff, patients, their [attendants] and the public in general," he said.

"We have spoken to the management of NICVD and according to them NAB did not give them any prior intimation and the hospital had provided all the record required by the bureau and was fully cooperating. The fictitious NAB inquiry was going on for the last couple of years. Whenever NAB asked for the record, it was provided with it, in hard and soft copies in a timely manner," said Dr Tipu Sultan of the PMA.

"We also observe interference of federal institutions in the affairs of the provincial government of Sindh as evident from the attempt to occupy the twin islands, the IGP case and this latest interference in the hospital," said Habibuddin Junaidi of the Peoples Labour Bureau.

"It is on record that the federal government wants to take over control of the hospital. This interference is unconstitutional, unacceptable and against the spirit of provincial autonomy as provided through the 18th Amendment," he added.

"Health is a basic right of citizens and it is the responsibility of the state to provide this right. However, a large majority of people are deprived of this right and when institutions such as NICVD try to provide such services, they are targeted and maligned and harassed. We consider this as an attack on the fundamental rights of millions of people," said Asad Iqbal Butt of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

"We are not against transparency and accountability and would welcome any serious efforts of establishing a credible mechanism in this regard. However, NAB has lost its credibility and legitimacy and its action against NICVD is one such example of abuse of power," said Mehnaz Rehman of the Aurat Foundation.

#### **NAB's apology sought**

"Given these facts we would like to demand an apology from the bureau for raiding NICVD, harassing its staff and creating panic among its patients. We also want an inquiry against NAB officials who are misusing their power and violating the basic principles of justice. We also demand that the federal government and institutions under it stop interfering in the affairs of the provincial government of Sindh," said Nasir Mansoor of the National Trade Union Federation.

It was unanimously demanded that the federal government must clarify its position whether it wants to take over the control of the NICVD and the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre.

“We also want to make it clear that any interference or unjustified actions against NICVD would be considered an attempt of snatching the right to health facilities from the poor working class and we would resist it by all means. And finally, if NAB does not refrain from such misadventures, we would resist it through legal means and by public protest since we stand in solidarity and support of NICVD, its management, staff and patients who receive treatment from this world-class free-of-cost health facility,” they said.

Fahim Siddiqui of the Karachi Union of Journalists, Saeed Baloch of Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, Farhat Parveen of NOW Communities, Bushra Arain of Lady Health Workers, Zehra Khan of Home Based Women Workers Federation and social activist Naghma Iqtedar also spoke.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 03/11/2020)

### **Obesity cases in Pakistan tripled in recent years, say experts**

Expressing concern over high prevalence of diabetes in Pakistan, experts at a scientific session held on Sunday at a local hotel advised people to reduce extra fat through regular exercise and dietary changes as this would help them reduce diabetes risk by up to 58 per cent.

They pointed out that the prevalence of obesity had increased in children and adolescents in developing countries. In Pakistan, they noted, the number of obese people had tripled in recent years.

The event was organised by Diabetic Association of Pakistan (DAP) and the WHO Collaborating Centre in Karachi.

Sharing data on the status of diabetes care, Prof Abdul Basit, the DAP secretary general, in a session dedicated to late Prof Abdus Samad Shera, said Pakistan was one of the countries with a very high prevalence rate of diabetes.

“Currently, there are over 19 million people with diabetes in the country and 26.2 million Pakistanis will have diabetes by the year 2030. Nearly 9.6 million children are overweight and obese,” he said, adding that prevalence of hypertension had doubled in the country.

#### **50pc reduction in amputation**

He also talked about the network of foot clinics for diabetics established with the support of World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) and said the 150 clinics established across the country had resulted in the reduction of amputation rate by 50 per cent.

Another important initiative taken with the support of the WDF, he informed the audience, was Insulin My Life model clinics set up across Sindh with an aim to provide Type 1 Diabetes care.

“So far, 34 clinics have been established providing free-of-cost care to children and adolescents. To build capacity, we have introduced the multidisciplinary team approach in diabetes care. “

About future plans, he said these projects included constitution of the National Health Network for Diabetes Control and Prevention and community level awareness programmes.

Talking about lifestyle management and diabetes, Prof M. Zaman Shaikh, the DAP joint secretary, said diabetes prevention was as basic as eating more healthy.

“Becoming more physically active and losing extra fat is vital. It’s never too late to start. Making a few simple changes in your lifestyle now may help avoid the serious health complications of diabetes down the road. There are many benefits of regular physical activity that help lose weight, lower blood sugar, boost sensitivity to insulin, which helps keep blood sugar within a normal range,” he noted.

Citing a trial held in the US, he said the participants who lost around seven per cent of initial body weight and exercised regularly reduced the risk of developing diabetes by 58 per cent.

Dr Shaikh warned that childhood obesity must not be taken lightly as it “may be a predisposing factor” for many diseases.

Prof Shabeen Naz Masood, the DAP joint secretary, Karachi, shared her insights into gestational diabetes mellitus and described it as glucose intolerance that began or first diagnosed during pregnancy and usually resolved after delivery.

“One in seven births is affected by gestational diabetes mellitus. It’s a growing health concern in many parts of the world. Pakistani population is especially vulnerable to developing this condition because of genetic, social, and environmental factors,” she said.

The gestational diabetes had serious, long-term consequences for both baby and mother, including a predisposition to obesity, metabolic syndrome and diabetes later in life, she added.

Retired Lt General Moinuddin Haider, the chief guest and former Sindh governor, appreciated DAP’s efforts towards diabetes care in Pakistan.

Farhana Tabassum, director of Undergraduate Programmes at Ziauddin University, College of Nursing, and Prof Noor Jehan Samad also spoke.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 09/11/2020)

### **WHO temporarily restores polio workers' contracts**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has extended the contractual services of union council polio officers (UCPOs) who were made redundant after October 31.

However, the extension of the UCPOs, posted in 170 high-risk UCs in Sindh, has only been made for two months, until December 31 - and that too after the district administrations strongly recommended continuing their services for achieving results in polio immunisation campaigns.

Local authorities had expressed reservations at the discontinuation of the UCPOs and polio eradication officers (PEOs), citing a lack of capability of the district health offices to replace the field staff.

"...reduction in the posts of UCPOs and PEOs is anticipated from the EOC [Emergency Operation Centre], which will only augment the challenge of the poliovirus immensely because the staff has not only acted as whistleblowers but also acted as frontline fighters in every campaign," read a letter written by Hyderabad deputy commissioner Fuad Ghaffar Soomro to the Sindh Emergency Operations Centre for polio coordinator, over a month ago.

During the recent polio immunisation campaign in Hyderabad, held from November 2 to 6, 10 of the 22 UCPOs were engaged on the basis of daily wages, in the capacity of the temporary taluka support person (TTSP).

Responding to their sacking, the UCPOs held demonstrations in several cities, including in Hyderabad.

Sikandar Ali Shoro, a UCPO who led the protest in Hyderabad, claimed that without them, the district administration and the local health authorities would not be able to achieve the desired results from the campaign. "We not only provided crucial support to the health authorities in the polio drives but also remained on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic," he asserted.

Another UCPO at the protest, Muhammad Hassan, contended that without an adequate, dedicated team, there was a possibility of further spread of the crippling virus.

Meanwhile, another polio worker, speaking to The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity, stated that their temporary restoration would not allow the Sindh Health Department to find their replacement.

"The WHO and the Sindh Health Department will have to find a coordinated solution to this issue if the authorities are serious about eradicating this virus, which remains a huge challenge for Pakistan," he added.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 12/11/2020)

### **Rising cases of dog-bite**

After seeing the Sindh government's failure to properly control the barrage of dog-bite cases in the province over the past several years, the courts have intervened to set things right. A district and sessions court in Ghotki has ordered registration of FIRs against municipal officers of the district for the dog-bite cases taking place there from Oct 27 to Nov 9. The court's order is in line with the Sindh High Court's directions of Oct 21 to the police to register FIRs against chief municipal officers for all dog-bite cases that occurred within their municipalities. The law prescribes six months' imprisonment and also loss of job. The high court had also asked deputy commissioners of all districts to monitor the campaign against stray dogs and municipal officers to submit weekly reports in the local courts. Two such FIRs have been registered in Matiari and Hyderabad districts.

Since 2019, thousands of dog-bite incidents have occurred in the province. In 2020 up to September, 150,000 cases have taken place with Karachi topping the list with 17,800 cases and Umerkot the last in the list with 7,500 cases. Statistics for other districts are between these two figures. In 2019, as many as 195,761 cases of dog-bite had occurred. Figures are not available on deaths from rabies. A few months ago the Sindh government had announced a detailed procedure for culling stray dogs on a scientific basis. Unfortunately, so far not much progress seems to have been made in this regard.

The situation is frightening as the government has expressed its inability to provide an adequate number of vaccines for dog-bite, saying earlier vaccines were imported from India and now it is not possible. For the past several years, vaccine is available in the open market at prices beyond the reach of the common people. Is there only one country in the entire world from where vaccines at affordable prices can be imported? The government's plea is hardly convincing. Prolonged power outages at night have further worsened the situation.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 13, 15/11/2020)

### **Hospitals sound alarm amid surge**

As the curve for coronavirus turns upwards once again and with Sindh reporting over 1,300 cases on Monday, hospital administrations in the provincial capital are increasingly worried about the virus resurgence, expressing concern that they may soon run out of space.

The provincial health department, though, claims hospitals in Karachi have sufficient capacity at the moment, with its data showing approximately half the Covid-19 intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the metropolis to be unoccupied.

The health department's data for Monday, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune, states that 228 of the total 434 ICU beds in hospitals across Karachi were vacant on the day, along with 1,007 of the 1,330 high-dependency unit beds and 3,984 of the 4,067 isolation ward beds in the city.

But there are some discrepancies between this data and that provided by the hospitals themselves.

According to the management of Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital, all 16 beds in its coronavirus ICU ward are fully occupied. The same is the case for the Covid-19 ICU wards at Ziauddin Hospital's Clifton and North Nazimabad campus.

The Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital administration informed The Express Tribune that there are a total of 141 beds for virus patients in the ICU and high-dependency unit (HDU), along with eight ventilators. They added that 88 beds and all but one ventilator were occupied. Health department data, though, shows 14 vacant ICU beds with ventilators.

At Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, sources told The Express Tribune, there are 90 beds for Covid-19 patients, with 24 in the HDU and 12 with ventilators. According to the data provided by the health department, all ICU beds there were occupied as of Monday, while 19 HDU beds were vacant.

Lyari General Hospital said it had 60 ICU and HDU beds, with 10 ventilators, with the health department saying it has six available ICU beds.

While Dow University of Health Sciences said its 30-bed ICU ward was fully occupied, the health department claimed none of its beds were occupied.

Meanwhile, the Sindh Infectious Diseases Hospital and Research Centre was near capacity on Monday, with only two empty ICU beds and none in the HDU, and 70 of 150 HDU and ICU beds were occupied at the Expo Centre field isolation facility. Aga Khan University Hospital, too, has all its coronavirus ICU beds occupied and only four HDU beds vacant, according to the health department.

However, 30 out of 40 HDU beds at the Sindh Services Hospital, along with all ventilators, are available, while the health department's data showed that Liaquat National Hospital appeared to have 14 ICU beds and 11 HDU beds available.

Besides, the 100-bed ward meant to be set up at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) remains non-functional, despite being inaugurated by Federal Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar in July.

JPMC executive director Dr Seemin Jamali told The Express Tribune that with the second wave of the pandemic, which was deemed more dangerous, the number of patients at hospitals was increasing. "But JPMC is still admitting coronavirus patients, and people from different hospitals are being referred here," she claimed.

Health department spokesperson Meeran Yousuf, meanwhile, said that the provincial government had enhanced the capacity of hospitals in this regard very recently. "Our hospitals have enough space, but the number of patients is going up with every passing day," she added. "Most of them need HDU beds, not ventilators, and we have enough HDU beds right now."

But, she added, if the number of patients continued to rise in the coming weeks, the situation would turn critical for hospitals.

According to her, the second portion of the Sindh Infectious Diseases Hospital and Research Centre had also been made functional. "But people prefer going to private hospitals and don't trust our facilities."

Dr Naseem Salahuddin, an infectious diseases expert at the Indus Hospital, also expressed worry about the increasing burden on hospitals, calling for the arrangement of more beds and ventilators. "If the circumstances remain the same, the situation will spiral out of control," she warned, adding that a large number of health officials and medical workers had also been infected.

#### **Ban on indoor dining**

Separately, in view of the virus surge, Karachi commissioner and administrator Iftikhar Shallwani imposed a ban on indoor dining at restaurants in the metropolis, to be in effect from Tuesday.

He directed the city's deputy commissioners to ensure that restaurants only permitted dining in open spaces.

(By Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 24/11/2020)

### **PIMA warns of impending healthcare crisis if SOPs not followed**

Senior doctors, health experts and medical scientists on Monday questioned the attitude of the government and people from all walks of life during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic as regulatory bodies' failure to implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) and irresponsible actions of major political parties was pushing the country towards one of its worst health crises.

They warned that if the people, political parties and traders failed to follow SOPs and continue ignoring their warnings, there would be no other option but to impose a complete lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus and save the health system from total collapse.

The warning was given by the health experts associated with the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA), who claimed that “hundreds” of doctors and paramedics had lost their lives due to Covid-19 in the country and it would be almost impossible to convince those still serving to continue their job amid serious violations of SOPs by the people.

“It’s now established that we are facing the second wave of Covid-19, which is proving to be highly lethal,” Prof Sohail Akhtar, a prominent pulmonologist associated with the Indus Health Network (IHN) and former PIMA president, told a news conference at the Karachi Press Club.

*The association calls for a stricter lockdown if people, political parties continue to ignore safety measures*

“We are running out of space and beds at our leading health facilities in Karachi. A list compiled by us indicates that there were no beds available at the ICUs and HDUs of nine leading hospitals in Karachi three days back. The [Covid-19] positivity has reached up to 10 per cent. Thousands of people are being tested positive and hundreds of them are requiring hospitalisation,” he said.

#### **Call to reduce business hour further**

Another former PIMA president, Prof Misbah ul Aziz, said hardly 20pc people were wearing masks while moving outside homes, which was extremely “shameful and unfortunate”.

He demanded that the government use whatever measures possible including imposition of heavy fines, legislation or penalties to make wearing of masks mandatory outside homes.

“If people are not following the SOPs, kindly implement a strict lockdown as not only common people but a large number of doctors are getting killed while treating patients at hospitals and their clinics,” Prof Aziz said and added that business timings should be further reduced in the country.

Dr Faiyaz Alam strongly criticised Prime Minister Imran Khan for ignoring Karachiites in his health insurance scheme, saying it was a serious discrimination with the residents of the country’s commercial capital, who contributed to the national exchequer more than any other city.

“Why are you [PM] not issuing Sehat Insaf Cards to the people of Karachi? Don’t we have poor people in this city? Why people of KP and other parts of the country are dearer to you as compared to those living in Karachi,” he questioned.

He also demanded that the government immediately launch a short-term insurance scheme for doctors and paramedics, saying the family of every doctor and healthcare provider dying from Covid-19 should be paid at least Rs10 million.

Dr Zeeshan Ansari spoke about re-infections among Covid-19 positive people and said all those who had contracted the disease previously, should also be very careful as they could be infected again.

He asked the government to start using the coronavirus antigen screening, which was very accurate and cost-effective as compared to PCR tests.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 08/12/2020)

### **Persons with disabilities**

This week, I had the honour of escorting the keynote speaker of the Karachi Conference to the TV studio of our Centre for Excellence in Journalism at IBA’s City Campus.



Even though the building that houses our Centre — Aman Towers — is designed to facilitate people with disabilities, there were points where moving him was a challenge. This made me wonder about other buildings in Pakistan and the overall challenges disabled people face in their daily lives.

December 3 is marked as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). It is about time we talked more about their problems.

In a study conducted last year by Aatik Arsh and Haider Darain, it was pointed out that in order to protect rights of PWDs and to make them functional members of society, our government must provide many constitutional and legal provisions.

The most important national policy in this regard is fixed job quota for PWDs in both the government and the private sector. In 1981, then president of Pakistan Zia-ul-Haq allocated 1% job quota for PWDs through an ordinance while in 1998, Prime minister Nawaz Sharif increased this to 2%. The present job quota for PWDs in all provinces of Pakistan is 2% except Punjab where the quota was raised to 3% in 2015.



A National policy for PWDs in 2002 clearly mentions that Pakistan has joined the select group of countries, which has not only ratified ILO Convention 159, but have also taken active legal steps to introduce legislation which lays down quota for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Even though several national policies exist regarding legal rights of PWDs in the country, PWDs are still deprived of their rights in Pakistan. They remain a marginalised part of society and they are almost always neglected and ignored in the community.

The main reason behind it is that these policies are only present in papers and never implemented. These policies are useless until and unless they are implemented with true spirit, argue the authors of this report.

Earlier, a report titled “Moving from the Margins — Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan” recommended that Pakistan develop a comprehensive set of laws to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities in all aspects of living. This includes laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities about discrimination, education, employment, communication, infrastructure and transport, and civil rights.

It has also recommended the establishment of a lead government department to develop and monitor the implementation of policies that protect the rights of persons with disabilities. This should be available at both the federal and the provincial level. But this is not only the responsibility of the government. It is imperative that there is an effective use of government and other stakeholder resources and funds for rehabilitation, health, education, and employment services. This can be done with proper strategy development and regular monitoring.

The report suggests that innovative community-based mechanisms can alleviate the burden on the government. There are successful examples in Pakistan, such as the Lady Health Worker Program and similar community-based mechanisms, which can help in building awareness, changing attitudes and driving change.

An interesting area is education. It is believed that special education promotes segregation, but inclusive education, where persons with disabilities are in the same classroom as mainstream students, makes educational services more accessible. Studies also show that this has a positive impact on costs and on changing attitudes. This requires changes in school infrastructure and investment in better teacher training.

Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) need to work together to ensure a united front that communicates change from a rights-based approach. DPOs in Pakistan are sometimes still focused on a charity or medical approach, which are both important services, especially where the government falls short. But there needs to be better awareness of the need for broader change.

One important point is that persons with disabilities must be represented in the parliament. There are seats currently reserved for various minority groups, but not a single one for persons with disabilities. This will have an impact on policy development and changing society’s image of persons with disabilities.

We cannot afford to ignore millions of Pakistanis who are currently out of sight because of disability but who, if given a chance, could contribute significantly to the country. Let us try and fight for them.  
(By Kamal Siddiqi The Express Tribune, 15, 14/12/2020)

### **Doctors protest attack on healthstaff at NICH**

Doctors and other healthcare staff of the National Institute of Child Health protested on Monday against vandalism and assault on doctors by the family of an infant girl who had died at the health facility.

The protesting doctors and staff also boycotted the Out Patient Department (OPD) on the day. Eighteen-month-old minor girl, Sara Khan, had passed away on Saturday night, due to pneumonia. She had been under treatment at the paediatric ward at NICH. The protestors marched from Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre to NICH and shouted slogans calling for their demands to be met. The doctors condemned the attack on them and maintained that the baby had died due to the unavailability of a ventilator at the NICH, which was the Sindh government’s fault. Young Doctors Association (YDA) leader Dr Mehboob said that the lack of security arrangements for health officials is alarming.

On behalf of the YDA, he demanded the establishment of a Sindh Rangers check-post at the health facility to permanently resolve the issue. Or else they would boycott all services at hospitals, he warned. Later, the Grand Health Alliance presented their charter of demands before NICH Director Dr Jamal Raza. They stated that the NICH did not accept any of their demands, which included establishment of a Rangers’ picket, ending the contract with SNC security company, the suspension of a few officials from the administration department, increasing the number of ventilators and more. “We will continue to boycott the OPDs if our demands are not accepted,” he said. However, Dr Raza claimed that they had contacted Sindh Rangers officials and a picket would be established by the evening.

#### **FIR lodged**

Earlier on the day, Saddar Police had registered a case against the vandalism and attack on the hospital staff and launched investigations into the matter. The case was registered on behalf of a private security guard against the father of the deceased baby girl and others. According to the text of the FIR, the complainant, Fahad Younus, and another security guard, Sher Muhammad, were on duty with a lady security personnel Mariam Khan in the pediatric ward of NICH when the baby girl passed away.

Her father, Farhat Khan, called 25 individuals to the hospital, who assaulted lady doctors, paramedical staff and security guards and damaged doors, windows and furniture of the hospital. The FIR stated that Khan and his party left with Sara's body without collecting her death certificate after causing all the damage.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 22/12/2020)

### Polio questions

THE Independent Monitoring Board that oversees polio eradication efforts on behalf of donor agencies, recently highlighted a crucial observation by Dr Faisal Sultan, SAPM on health: if the resources meant for combating polio could be mobilised effectively against the coronavirus, why hadn't polio itself been eradicated? This is a mystery for the government to unravel, and perhaps it can look for clues in the IMB's own comments that "it is not enough to see [polio] through an infectious disease technical lens". For instance, the IMB mentions in its recent report that a National Strategic Advisory Group, meant to facilitate all-party cooperation on polio, did not meet even once. The report also raised concern over missed meetings of provincial task forces and a lack of coordination between federal and provincial officials over effective campaign strategies for different localities. It lamented the "box-ticking" approach of older provincial officials that prevented them from engaging in meaningful discussions with federal officials and their peers. The report stressed the need for "teamwork" between the centre and the province, while acknowledging the "huge burden" on the health authorities.

Going back to the SAPM's comments, however, it should be remembered that for Covid-19 related measures, the government had some time to prepare and put in place precautionary measures. Secondly, to be able to effectively combat the spread of Covid-19, the authorities found a ready-made human resource infrastructure in terms of immunisation teams that had taken decades to build while trying to control the spread of polio. Moreover, unlike polio, the Covid-19 virus is less controversial with the public and easier to develop a consensus on, provided the government focuses on proper messaging. Pakistan was close to eradicating polio by the end of 2018 when a series of blunders by the top tier of the polio management programme resulted in an uptick in vaccine-derived cases. This was also due to structural flaws in the programme. One can only hope that the loopholes are plugged so that both infections are eradicated.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 30/12/2020)

### Eight Pakistanis included in world's top 100 nurses, midwives

Eight Pakistani nurses and midwives have figured in the Global-2020 100 Outstanding Women Nurses and Midwives.

All the eight nurses and midwives from Pakistan are faculty or alumni at the Aga Khan University's School of Nursing and Midwifery (SONAM).

One hundred nurses and midwives from 43 countries have been recognised for their contribution to raising healthcare standards across the globe, especially during these difficult times.

These outstanding leaders have been acknowledged by Women in Global Health (WGH), which collaborated with the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Population Fund, Nursing Now, International Council of Nurses and International Confederation of Midwives on the list.

The recognition marks the end of WHO's yearlong Year of the Nurse and the Midwife 2020 campaign, which recognises the vital role of nurses and midwives in providing health services and in helping achieve targets under the global sustainable development goals.

The Aga Khan Nursing School's dean, Dr Rozina Karmaliani, has been honoured under the Board and Management category in recognition of her efforts to spearhead improvements in adolescent health, strengthen research capacities and integrate research into education and practice.

Faculty members Yasmin Parpio and Samina Vertejee have been appreciated under the Community Hero category for their services in community health nursing, while Saima Sachwani is recognised for her contributions in developing impactful nursing curriculum under the Human Capital Development category.

Nurse-midwife Marina Baig has also been lauded for leveraging mobile health technology to improve maternal health outcomes under the Innovation, Science & Health category.

Three SONAM alumni have also been recognised under the Community Hero category.

They include Dr Shela Hirani for her efforts to promote, protect and support breastfeeding during the Covid-19 pandemic, Neelam Punjani for her work in improving access to sexual and reproductive health rights and Sadaf Saleem for her contributions to geriatric nursing.

"It is an honour to be acknowledged by the international public health and nursing fraternity," said Dr Karmaliani. "This year has been particularly challenging for healthcare providers, all of whom have showed incredible commitment in their respective roles in responding to the Covid-19 crisis.

"It is encouraging to see that our government and healthcare stakeholders in Pakistan are coming together and deliberating on investing in nursing and midwifery education, practice and research. There is no better time than now to acknowledge the critical role of nurses in creating resilient healthcare systems."

The nominated women represent several hundreds of thousands of nurses and midwives globally who have been on the front line of the pandemic and have shown courage and compassion while working in a variety of clinical and community settings.

By acknowledging these nursing and midwifery leaders, WGH renews its call to WHO member nations to establish and support strategic leadership positions for nurses and midwives in health facilities, involve them in key decisions, support diversity in recruitment strategies, reduce the gender pay gap and ensure a safe work environment.

(By News paper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 30/12/2020)

### **Incinerator at LGH non-functional for months**

The incinerator at the Sindh Government Lyari General Hospital (LGH), Karachi, has been out of order for several months and the hospital administration has been unable to get it repaired during this period.

The machine is used for the disposal of medical waste, including disposable syringes, drips, urine or blood bags, needles, fluids and other waste, which is harmful to medical staff and the environment if not safely disposed of.

The incinerator developed some fault several months ago, and needs immediate repair. The LGH administration is disposing of medical waste through private vehicles, posing a serious threat to visiting patients at the hospital and the environment.

An official at the Lyari hospital told the PPI news agency: "The hospital generates a big quantity of infected and non-infected medical waste on a daily basis out [of] which infected medical waste such as syringes, drips, urine or blood bags, needles, fluids and other used items are disinfected through steriliser, but this machine has not been working for several months."

At present, the hazardous material is taken to an unknown location through private trucks.

Medical superintendent of the Lyari General Hospital Dr Agha Zubair was not available for comments.

(By PPI Dawn, 14, 31/12/2020)