

## Managing an Orthopedic Outpatient Department (OPD) during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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Dear Editor,

Pakistan reported its first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020.<sup>1</sup> After the initial outbreak, the virus began to engulf the entire nation. Up till 25<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 a total of 294,193 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed along with 6, 267 deaths.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, Pakistan was quick to take action; the country was able to control the spread of the virus by imposing quarantine, travel restrictions, and closure of non-essential establishments. The purpose of this letter is to provide insight into how hospitals can make certain changes to provide the best possible care to the patients under dire circumstances.

Combined Military Hospital (CMH) Lahore is a tertiary care hospital run by the Pakistan Army. As a result of the pandemic, the Orthopedic department at CMH Lahore made certain modifications in the way the Outpatient Department (OPD) is managed to ensure the safety of the patients and the doctors.

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Orthopedic team would facilitate several hundred walk-in patients at their OPD every week on Tuesday and Thursday. After COVID-19 began to spread across Pakistan, the hospital had to shut down its Orthopedic OPD from 1st April, 2020 till 14th May, 2020. However, trauma cases that reported in the emergency department were regularly dealt with while taking the necessary protective measures. To cater to all patients, CMH hospital reopened the Orthopedic OPD on the 15th of May 2020, while following the necessary standard operating procedures. For the following month, the Orthopedic Outpatient Department (OPD) functioned on an appointment basis system. Twenty patients were seen on each OPD day. Each patient was allotted a separate room and was made to wear a mask while practicing social distancing. In addition, no attendants were allowed to accompany the patients.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the available Orthopedic team at the OPD consisted of two consultants, two post-graduate trainees, and two house-officers but after 15th May, 2020, only two consultants were called upon for the OPD. Each consultant would rotate only once a week. The doctor would be seated 6 feet from the patient and was equipped with personal protective equipment including face shields. Lastly, a rule of four patients

per hour was adopted. This allowed each patient a maximum time of fifteen minutes with the consultant. These changes were adhered till 30th July 2020. Afterward, the limit of patients per hour was increased to eight.

From 15th August 2020, as the COVID curve flattened across Pakistan, the hospital decided to resume the normal functionality of the orthopedic OPD. It was reverted to the walk-in consultation system, allowing the Orthopedic team to once again facilitate hundreds of patients weekly. The system adopted by the CMH Orthopedic department during COVID era was an excellent example for other hospitals and healthcare settings to follow in case we find ourselves in another COVID-19 outbreak.

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