Sir,

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a recently identified condition caused by a Corona virus, MERS CoV. The first reported case was in Saudi Arabia in the year 2012.1 Since April 2012 to present day, there have been a total of 536 cases with 145 deaths, a case fatality rate of 27%,2 with the majority being reported in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Jordan and Qatar). The people being affected by MERS CoV developed severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath.1

One of the largest outbreaks of MERS CoV to-date has been described by Assiri et al.,3 which described that the virus is transmissible from human to human. The study also went on to highlight that healthcare settings are by far the most suitable environment for the spread of MERS CoV. The highest number of cases by far have been reported in Saudi Arabia.1 The number of Pakistani expatriates in Saudi Arabia is on the rise; the number currently standing at over 1.5 million.4 In fact, the Pakistani population is the highest overseas population in Saudi Arabia. A large number of these Pakistani expatriates are healthcare workers, at least 6000, currently,5 with more being required to assist with the Centers of Corona (MERS).6

Every year, numerous expatriates return home for a vacation. This large influx of Pakistanis is most notable on the religious and social occasions of Hajj and Eid, hence it is apparent that there is a need to spread awareness on preventative measures from the MERS CoV. If a person, having travelled to the Middle East, develops a fever or symptoms of a lower respiratory illness within 14 days of their arrival, they should consult their healthcare provider and have a work up done. Currently, available tests include Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR). Current recommendations for hospitalized patients with MERS include placement in an Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIR). Healthcare personnel are recommended to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which include gloves, gowns, eye protection and a respirator or a facemask at the very least.7

Currently, there are no specific treatments for MERS and nor is there any vaccine. To keep safe at a personal level, one should ensure proper hand washing practice, avoid openly sneezing in public and avoid sharing utensils with affected people.7

As of yet, MERS has not indicated the potential for a pandemic.3 However, with Pakistan already struggling to battle Polio, it cannot afford to further burden its’ healthcare system in the form of MERS.

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