

Health Research During COVID-19 Pandemic: Nepalese Perspectives

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Health research in any field is essential for the health development in the country as a whole. There is a disparity of health research between high income- and low-middle income- countries (LMICs) around the globe. Health research is severely affected by COVID-19 pandemic particularly in LMICs like Nepal. However, the number of COVID-19 related research reports have increased dramatically. Many non-COVID researches were either halted or dropped altogether because of the priority issues particularly in LMICs. Even essential health services were also affected during COVID-19 pandemic. However, beginning from the later part of the 2020, non-COVID health related publications also increased in Nepal because of free time for non-COVID health professionals when most of health resources were mobilized to manage COVID patients.

According to the constitution of the Federal Republic Nepal, health is a fundamental right of all people. Healthy people will contribute to the national development. Health research is essential for not only health but also economic development of the country. Disease burden and health priorities are very different in LMICs than in high-income countries. There is also a vast disparity in research fund allocation. Hence, there is a huge disparity in health research and publication. In general, LMICs are less prepared for disasters and pandemic management.

Research is needed for every active health care professional in order to improve scientific knowledge and promote a high quality service even in resource limited settings.¹ Active research work of a clinician can improve patient's outcome and reduce mortality. Every individual patient can be included in research of course after an appropriate informed consent process. Publication is the ultimate step of the research. Any journal is better than no publication. We need both quantity and quality (citations) of publications, which will determine academic status of the institute.

In general, health research can be categorized based on the current pandemic into: ongoing research, new research and future research. It is challenging to conduct health research particularly clinical trials during pandemics because of many unavoidable reasons like personal safety, isolation and limited access to public places. Sometimes modifications of the existing protocols are also required during pandemic.² Running a high quality study and enrolling adequate number of participants are also limiting factors. Safety of the participants and the health personnel are crucial in health research. Many non-COVID health studies were expected to be either dropped or modified during COVID-19 pandemic.

The second wave of COVID-19 in Nepal started to impact the country

in April 2021 almost one year after the first wave. The second wave has become more severe and widespread than the first one.³ This virulent infection was more contagious and prevalent in slum and rural areas, where testing was not adequate. Many people died without diagnosis.⁴ Children and young people were more affected this time than before. The damage of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic including deaths has been estimated far more than the report of the Government. However, the level of confidence among general public facing the lockdown during the second wave was much higher, because we learned how to live amid COVID-19 pandemic and doing as new normal in daily activities.⁵ Other reason could be the vaccination program against COVID-19 in Nepal, particularly among health care professionals and frontline workers in pandemic.

There was a profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on every aspect of health care and delivery in Nepal.⁶ Many health services were interrupted

for few months particularly during lockdown period. It is very uncertain of how long this pandemic lasts and we are bound to live with COVID-19 for ever.

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