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Country Quarantine during COVID-19: Critical or Not?

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Letter to Editor

The new coronavirus or severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), emerging from Wuhan, China, is the subject of attention in these days world news headlines. (1). The first case was reported on 31 December 2019, and the disease was declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO), a month later, on 30 January 2020 (2).

Iran is one of the most affected countries with more than 290,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (April 29th) and unfortunately more than 15,000 associated deaths. According to the geographic distribution data, all 31 provinces in Iran have been affected. The first two cases were announced in Qom and then north-central provinces became the hotspot regions, mainly capital cities.

There is no specific medication or vaccine available for this infection and other COVID-19 outbreaks seem to be inevitable; this emphasizes the need for finding the most beneficiary preventive measures (1). Isolation, quarantine, social distancing and community containment are now the available options. Isolation for the purpose of symptomatic and non-infected individuals' segregation does not appear to be sufficient alone due to the long incubation period of COVID-19. Quarantine as a previous successful measure in severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic control in 2003, aiming to restrict the movement of suspected persons (maybe not infected or infected but without symptoms) could be beneficial. Social distancing is another option which means to reduce the gatherings in order to avoid close contact of non-detected cases and community. The last strategy is community containment, chosen by the Government of China. It is the restriction of the whole society and limiting the traffic only to vital needs (3). However, Mass quarantine may increase the anxiety, especially among those having previous psychiatric problems and the elderly, even causing other health problems (4).

In Iran, there is community transmission, which means the infection is expanding in numerous independent clusters (6). Therefore, social distancing like schools and universities closure is beneficial and was fulfilled on the 23rd of February. Education guidelines, travelers screening,

charitable donations, self-assessment system and, travelers control, may have also contributed to this outcome. The result was the decreasing number of confirmed cases in April. From the beginning of the epidemic, the government have emphasized on social distancing rather than mass quarantine. Travels between cities, although had declined comparing with the last years, still were taking place. In April the government decided to move the policy to smart social distancing and the social activities begin to resume normal(7). However, due to the reopening of the offices and increased hubbub, the number of infected individuals is increasing with a stable trend.

Some Asian countries have implemented successful strategies of pandemic control. The strategies were most based on transmission control via isolation and lockdowns, like what Chinese government did in Wuhan (8). Although quarantine would face numerous obstacles, evidences support its efficacy in emerging infectious diseases (9). In Iran increased rate of transmission after returning the society to normal social activities resulted in the incremental trend. In conclusion, the best option available right now is transmission control. Infected cases must be detected promptly, isolated, and treated. However, isolation alone is not the answer, quarantine seems to be an advantageous tool, but its implementation needs resources. Furthermore, the entire society must be responsible and also educated about the disease. They should be aware of the alarming signs of the infection and should voluntarily quarantine themselves when having dubious mild symptoms or facing with a suspected person.

All people collaboration and awareness are needed to fight against the pandemic. May the disease be controlled by all working side by side; “Human beings are members of one another”.

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