



What makes me tick in the pan(dem)ic

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Abstract: The “pandemic” has come with “panic” embedded within it. The panic among health care workers is enormous. There is a fear of being infected and carrying the infection home to their children and the extended family. There is a constant tussle between overcoming these fears and stepping forward to take up responsibilities and duties. The article is a narrative of an ophthalmologist trying to think right and doing what best she can in times of the pandemic.

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Conflict, said Esther Harding, is the beginning of consciousness. I begin to slowly understand the complex conflicts of my brain and mind - the interplay of many dramatis personae. In the midst of the current pandemic, I see these conflicting internal silhouettes in me: one boldly commands, "Go ahead. For if you don't, who else will?" Another kills the command: "Why take the risk? You may not even survive to hear the clapping."

It is with this push-pull journey in my mind that I reach the hospital and wait patiently in the hope that I'll get a chance to do my bit in this difficult time. Can I ease the burden on the frontliners in some way? No, not truly. This fact saddens me. Never before have I questioned my choice of specialty - 'eyes'. Secretly, I wish I were an intensivist, or a physician, or a nurse, so I could be right there to offer my time and sweat to support the

pandemic heroes of the hour. If only....

Just like I am, I see others fighting conflicts of the mind. While some are walking free of fear, others are soaked in it. Some seem to totally trust their instincts, their actions, and probably their destiny, while others sow doubts in everything they see or hear. Some are moulting out as role models, others are locked down in their cocoons. For some, this is just another virus waiting to be contained. For some others, it's a monster that has scrambled minds more than lungs, without even infecting them. To them the world is an endless scarehouse and the clock seems to have halted in the dark shadows. They attempt to seek solace in the "stay home, stay safe" mantra and in rediscovering long forgotten skills and hobbies.

The fear is contagious - like brushfire. The fever is high all around, to the point of

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shattering the mercury of peace and patience. The temperature escalates with every statistical graph of worsening trends. The air becomes breathless when cities shuttle between red-orange shades with no sight of green. The cough is a silent gush of droplets of despair, coming periodically. The pan(dem)ic is true. We are yet to find a way. People are right. The PPE is inadequate and inefficient. The mask doesn't filter negativity. Hand wash doesn't clean up rumours and doubts. One meter distance can't separate us from reality. And to top it all, there's no drug for impatience and no vaccine for unstable thoughts.

The ship called 'duty' is being tossed in the stormy seas of an unseen enemy from inside the mind. The turbulence in me is no less. But, I want to think right. The boat has to reach the safe shores. I can't become the oar, nor can I calm the waters, but I can step forward to look for possible cracks in the boat and use my palm to seal it. I can be watchful of the winds and prepare the others to counter it. I can support the oars when the oarsmen need a break. Every action of theirs is of supererogation, nothing less. I can only be that buddy who is always there. I can do my bit. I will.

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