

# GIVING BACK TO HUMANITY IN COVID-19 TIMES- AN INITIATIVE BY BMDA IN THE CITY OF VADODARA

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## ABSTRACT

WHO acknowledged the corona Virus (COVID-19) a situation of ‘Pandemic’ on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, appealing all the countries to develop the effective strategies, so as to undertake the operative measures to combat the Pandemic situation. The Indian government to address the preventive, practical strategies to combat with outpouring cases of Covid-19 in India announced a sequence of arrangements to avert entry of the virus by establishing 11 official groups on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020 on diverse facets of COVID-19 management to take familiar declarations on the associated matters wavering from (i) medical emergency forecasting, (ii) availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine facility, disease investigation and testing, (iii) safeguarding obtainability of important medicinal apparatus, (iv) supplementing human resource and capacity building, (v) supply chain and logistics management, (vi) synchronization and coordination with private sector, (vii) economic and welfare measures, (viii) information, communications and public awareness, (ix) technology and data management, (x) public protest and (xi) strategic matters connected to lockdown. Comprehending the necessity of the hour, and to support the governments in taking proactive measures, many voluntary organizations, non-government organisation took pro-active steps in handling the situation. The paper reflects the Commendable proactiveness, related to public health response of Novel Corona virus undertaken by Baroda Muslim Doctors Association, a Non- government organization identified by the State Education Secretary- in- charge of Covid-19 operations for the city of Vadodara who identified the organization called BMDA and approached them to help the citizens of Baroda in handling and managing the Pandemic situation.

**Keywords:** Public Health, Local Government, Non- Government Organizations, BMDA (Baroda Muslim Doctor’s Association).

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## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has posed a global health crisis with a sharp rise in cases and deaths since it was first identified in the city of Wuhaan in December 2019. A nation like India, with a population of more than 1.34 billion— the second largest population in the world— was foreseen to face difficulty in governing the transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 among the citizens. Tremendous initiatives were strategically planned and implemented by the government to prevent the spread of the virus among the masses. As one of the precautionary measures, the Indian government implemented a 55-days lockdown throughout the country that started on

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March 25th, 2020, to reduce the transmission of the virus. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in India has taken up various proactive initiatives to handle the serious condition in the country levying various regulations in all the states of the country. Comprehending to the need of the hour, along with government, various voluntary, non-government organisations in collaboration with the local authorities have initiated various measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This paper deliberates the initiatives taken by one such non-Government organization – BMDA- (Baroda Muslim Doctor’s Association) in the city of Vadodara-Gujarat.

Vadodara, also called as Baroda is Gujarat’s third largest cultural capital with a population of 2,233,000 in the year 2021. In the City of Vadodara, the Covid-19 laid its feet in March 2020, when the first case – a Spain based NRI was admitted in Sir Sayaji Rao General Hospital and was kept under isolation. Thereafter, there was a tremendous increase in the Covid-19 cases in the city resulting in to the establishment of the quarantine/ isolation as well as hospitalization facility in the other government hospitals of the city. With the increase in number of cases rapidly in the Muslim populated city area the situations were out of control with local authorities. To combat the situations, the then State Education Secretary- Mr. Vinod Rao, who was also the COVID-19 operations in-charge for Vadodara city, began tapping NGOs and organisations considered to have influence in the Muslim community. In the first week of April 2020, Rao shortlisted half a dozen organisations and, among them, chose the Baroda Muslim Doctors Association (BMDA) for the outreach job. Baroda Muslim Doctor’s Association- a Non- Government Organization working towards the welfare of the needy and disadvantaged section of the society.

**About Baroda Muslim Doctors Association:** Baroda Muslim Doctors Association (BMDA) is an association of more than 650 Doctors and Para-medical Staff from Central & South Gujarat mainly belonging to Vadodara District is a Registered NGO. The association was set up 8 years ago with following objectives:

- To serve the underprivilege class of society through facilitating medical expenditure
- To fight and to spread awareness on mal-nutrition among Muslim community
- To reduce the number of School Drop outs from schools.
- To serve as helping hands during natural / un-precedented calamities.
- To motivate and encourages younger generation by felicitating them with Awards and recognition for their Meritorious Performance in Academics.

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Beside fulfilling the above-mentioned objectives, the association is an outstanding platform and recognizes the efforts of all those social workers who selflessly contributes towards Socio-Economic upliftment of the society.

After getting approval and permission from the Covid- 19 operation in charge, the association was one of key role player during the times of Covid-19.

### **BMDA in Covid 19 Times**

**Establishment of Isolation/ Quarantine Facilities:** The association established the quarantined facilities in 7 different places like hospitals, schools and Industrial Training Institute ensuring of all the essential needs of food, shelter, hygienic - sanitation facilities and under medical supervision of patients having mild to moderate Covid symptoms in all its isolation centres. The isolation centres ensured provision of the other related facilities like frequent visit and supervision by ophthalmologists, physiotherapist for women and elderly patients, along with gynaecologist visit for expecting mothers observing their isolation period at the centres. The services provided were for all citizens of the country irrespective of their gender, caste and religion ensuring equal treatment to all the Covid affected patients.

**Establishment of Counselling Centres/ Helpline:** Corresponding to the anxiety and panicking situation among people who were observing their quarantine period of 14 days, and their family members, BMDA also took one of the very significant initiatives of establishing the counselling centre, wherein the counselling sessions were undertaken by trained counsellors. Additionally, the centre did arrangements for quarantined patients at the centre through facilitating the interaction with the family members of those were observing their quarantine period through video calls. Moreover, the centre also created a Helpline number, for people who were observing homebased quarantine period.

**Organizing Blood Donation/ Plasma Donation Camps:** As a method of curative measure, when it was researched that plasma donation is one of the areas, which is proven to be a curative measure to Covid-19 effected patents. Addressing to the need, the volunteers and the doctors began their drive of spreading awareness pertaining to the importance of plasma donation, as well as they themselves were organizing camps to promote maximum plasma donation at the centres in support with collaborative hospitals. Furthermore, the centre also organized blood donation camps in order to meet the paucity of bloods among hospitals.

**Performing the Cremation of Covid effected patients:** This was a very crucial stage, wherein the volunteers and the team of doctors took the lead in performing the last rites of people dying with sue to Covid. Considering to the need, which brought to a situation where the hospital authorities, were lacking staff to do the last rites of people dying with Covid-19, BMDA team took initiative and were almost on their toes with the local authorities as well the hospital staff to perform the religious rites of people irrespective of the religion they belong to.

**Organizing Vaccination Drive:** When the Indian government announced to give vaccination to the citizens of the nation, BMDA was an authorized organization to be a part of the vaccination drive. BMDA was very active in organizing vaccination camps in the remote areas of the city. They also took active steps in spreading awareness among people on importance of vaccination as well as clearing doubts and anxiety among people related to vaccination. Even at this point of time i.e in 2022, the volunteers and the team of doctors are very active in the vaccination drive and are ensuring proper treatment of Covid effected people.

**The Challenges Faced:**

a) **Challenges to the Health Professionals:** Wearing suffocating plastic PPE suits for as long as 12 hours, the devoted doctors in the frontline of the fight against the mysterious pathogen work in frightful COVID centres near infectious patients. And yet, they successfully offered their services and personalized care gratuitous to all castes for a noble cause.

b) **Sensitizing the Masses and bringing them for Isolation:** This was one of the prominent challenges in front of the volunteers and the doctors wherein at the first stage, the patients who was detected to be Covid positive was not ready to accept the positivity of the test results, and were reluctant to quarantine themselves, and taking the necessary precautionary measure to spread others. Hence, this served as one of the huge challenges to develop a sense of trust and bring them to the isolation centres.

c) **Handling with the family members of the Covid affected patients:** Corresponding to the need of the isolation centres, and after bringing the covid effected patients at the centre, the next challenge was handling their family members who were anxious about their family members undergoing their isolation period as well as of those members who were detected with severe Covid-symptoms and were to be hospitalized in other hospitals.

d) **Managing the Funds to provide all the essential activities at all the isolation centres established by the BMDA team:** The isolation centres were established By BMDA in vivid locations of the city area. To provide with the essential services, there was a need of fund

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and resources to serve to the needs of approximately 100 Covid affected patients at each centre. BMDA volunteers and staff took this very supportively and managed its funds through various means like visiting door to door, Managing the fund from the Lillah and Zakat- Charity given by Muslims during the month of Ramazan.

**e) In case of Death of the patients, the religious rites in consideration with the Covid-19, guidelines:** This proved to be a major challenge, wherein the last religious rites were to be performed following all the Covid-19 guidelines. Whatever religion the covid effected patients belonged to, the last rites were done accordingly. The volunteers were facing a huge challenge in times of heavy rain.

**f) Supply of Life saving Drug- Oxygens/ Hydrochloroquionone/ Ramdesivir Injection:** During the Second wave of the Covid-19 in the city of Baroda, there was again increase in the number of cases, which demanded a huge supply of Oxygen, the hydrochloroquionone drug known as a lifesaving drug and the Ramdesivir injection which was again claimed to cure and save the lives of Covid effected patients at the centres and in the hospitals. There was an acute shortage of these life saving drugs, and lack of oxygen cylinder in relation with the number of cases. Hence, this was an important challenge saving the lives of people along with handling the grief, agony and anxiety of the family members of the Covid effected patients.

**g) Ensuring the availability of Blood for Covid- effected patients:** When blood banks in the city ran dry and patients' relatives running from pillar to post for the vital fluid, the team BMDA organized a blood camp on the day of Eid-ul Fitr to have the availability of blood and be given to needy one, resulting to the collection of 300 bottles of blood in a single day.

#### **Overview of the various initiatives undertaken by BMDA**

| <b>Sr. No</b> | <b>Particulars</b>  | <b>No</b> |
|---------------|---|-----------|
| 1             | Establishment of Isolation/ Quarantine Facilities at different localities | 07        |
| 2             | No of Doctors / Medical Attendants with varied area of specialization     | 15        |
| 3             | No of Volunteers ready for rendering their services 24*7                  | 52        |

|   |  |                   |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 4 | No of Quarantine patients  | 1065              |
| 5 | Provision of groceries and needed essentials on daily basis through community kitchens | 500-600 / Per day |
| 6 | Planning and Implementing the Vaccination drives in different areas                    | 25                |
| 7 | No of vaccinations   | 6800              |

### **Experiences Of the Patients Who Underwent Quarantine Period**

**Case-A:** I am a 30-year-old lady with two children, the elder son is 14 years of age and my younger daughter is 9 years, “I was taken to ITI centre – one of the first quarantined centre initiated by BMDA, when my husband was detected Covid Positive. After his positive results my entire family was taken to the government hospital for our Covid test and we along with my elder son was detected with positive result with moderate Covid symptoms. That was the time when government used to publicly notify the positive cases in the local newspaper of the city”. “Noticing the names and with the help of some known volunteers of BMDA, I was shifted to ITI centre, from the government hospitals, as the hospitals were insufficient in providing the needs to all”. On my third day at quarantine period, I was given the utter shock news of the death of my husband, who was kept under observation in one of the government hospitals as he was detected with severe Covid symptoms. As I am Muslim by religion, I have to follow “Iddat”- the waiting period after the death of a spouse. I was immediately provided with all the necessary arrangements of living in a separate room, with no male stranger allowed to enter or even interact with me as well as the other 2 ladies who were also in the same position as I was”. “I was really in a very disturbed position as I was unable to accept the fact that I won’t be able to see my soulmate anymore”. With no family support in the midst of this situations as none of them were allowed to come in the quarantine centre, the only medium of contact was through video calls. The entire team of BMDA, women volunteer along with the counsellors used to approach us, interact with us and supported for the next 11 days of my isolation period”.

“The time that I have passed at the ITI centre was not an easy phase of my life, as I had lost my husband, yet if I have to speak about the care and services provided by BMDA, is really commendable”. She added that even today, the team BMDA is regularly taking follow up of our family and is helping me out in satisfying the basic essentials needs of me and my children including the educational expense of them as “I have lost the bread earner of the family”.

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**Case B:** This case is of 50-year-old male who is fighting for his lung cancer. “I am suffering from the disease since past six months, and for the same, I have to regularly visit my chemo sessions once in 15 days, in one of the charitable cancer hospitals, as right now I have no source of income, due to my health issues”. “In the midst of the covid time, while i was commuting for my chemo sessions, I was detected with Covid Positive”. It was a holy month of Ramzaan, and my family members were trying to put me in in the hospital for further Covid treatment, but due to my cancer conditions, none of the government hospital took up my case and I was kept in an ambulance shifting from one hospital to another with no immediate treatment given.

“Since, I have no children of my own, but my niece who actively was working with the team BMDA, immediately contacted the doctors and they readily admitted in one of the quarantined hospitals managed by BMDA”. “I was given proper treatment, medications, regular visit of doctors and also good hygienic food were made available to me twice a day including morning snacks and brunch”.

“My wife who is a strong support to me was facing financial crunches for ensuring adequate treatment rendered to me, to an extent that she started asking people “Zakat”- the donation that wealthier and affluent Muslims are supposed to donate the amount out of all the wealth, and property that they have”.

The team BMDA was life saviour to me in times of Covid, but at the same time they have continued rendering the services in whatever terms they can till date.

### **Other Services of BMDA**

**Establishment of SEHAT- A Diagnostic Centre:** Corresponding to the need of the diagnostic centre, which is also a need of an hour, for curative measures, the team of doctors in BMDA have been successful in establishing a diagnostic centre rendering its services for the needy at subsidized rates.

**Educational Support to Students:** BMDA is the organization who is actively involved in identifying the needy students who are in to financial crisis due to the pandemic situation and the family is unable to support their education, hence the volunteers identify such students and provide them both monetary as well as non-monetary support to continue their education.

**Assisting the Masses towards the Government Schemes and Programmes:** According to the latest Census data 2011, the total literacy level among Muslims is 59.1% which

is lower than other socio-religious communities residing in India. Because of lack of education, there is lack of awareness among the masses on various government schemes and programmes levied for the minority population, certain groups such elderly and women. Identifying this situation, the team BMDA organizes various awareness camps for schemes like.

**Aayushman Bharat:** Health related scheme levied by the central government of India for the senior citizens.

**E- Shram Card:** One of the Welfare schemes levied by Ministry of Labour & Employment has established e-SHRAM portal for creating a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW), which will be linked with Aadhaar- A Unique identification of each citizen, for optimum realization of their employability and extend the benefits of the social security schemes to the beneficiaries. It is the first-ever national database of unorganised workers including migrant workers, construction workers, gig and platform workers, etc.

**Mukyamanti Amrutatam Yojana Card:** A health related scheme to applicable to all the citizens who have annual income of up to Rs. 6 Lakhs.

**Minority Educational Scholarship:** A Scheme for the educational upliftment of the students belonging to the minority community.

The team BMDA is actively facilitating the formalities required for above mentioned government schemes with an objective to widen the beneficiaries of the scheme.

**Recognition to the team BMDA:** With an intention of giving back to Humanity all the efforts undertaken by team BMDA is commendable in all the three waves that the nation has faced till date, and their services are still ongoing. The commendable efforts for treating more than 6500 covid patients, were recognized not in the city of Vadodara, but also in other surrounding cities of Gujarat like Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Surat etc.

The initiative was well recognized and appreciated for their tremendous effort during Covid-19 and was awarded with Pride of Baroda 2020- Health Care Icons by Times of India- a leading News agency in India.

The proactive effort of Baroda Muslim Doctors Association has indeed proven to be a very optimistic example of giving back to humanity in crisis times, the exemplary work carried out has served as a model for others and has also proven to be an inspiration to form such group comprising of volunteers and the health workers in other cities of Gujarat such as Mehsana, Ahemdabad, Surat.



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### **CONCLUSION**

The Covid-19 pandemic is indeed a very disturbing for the whole world, which has its long-term impact on social, economic, educational disturbances, but the initiatives taken by Baroda Muslim Doctors Association is an example and learning for the society on how to give back to humanity in times of crisis situation. The proactive work done by Muslim medicos in Baroda Muslim Doctors Association in worst-hit Gujarat is an example of going an extra mile to fulfil their medical-course pledge for serving and curing run-down patients and have proved that not all white-coats are money-grubbing pill-pushers and bone-benders.

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