

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Dear Editor,

We read with interest the article titled "Thoughts and awareness of medical students about COVID-19 pandemic" by Cifcibasi et al. (1) in your esteemed journal. The study sheds light on the awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic of medical students. This being a topic of interest for us, we would like to add a few points which we feel would enrich the discussion.

A study from Uganda, that have looked into the sources of information used by medical students to access information about COVID-19, found an expected massive reliance on online sources (2). This underscores the immense potential and the need to disseminate information to the public via online sources during times of crisis, such as the present pandemic. Unfortunately, another study surmised that official sites such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website or medical search engines like PubMed, which should reflect reliable sources of information, were less commonly used by medical students to obtain information when compared to social media and news media, which may be potential conduits for false news or incomplete information (3). This is alarming and raises the need to train medical students to obtain evidence from reliable sources and to critically analyze the information available online.

Another issue that medical students seem to face in terms of the pandemic is the social stigma associated with the diagnosis of COVID-19. In a study among medical students of Jordan, when asked whether they would want the matter to be private if a family member was in contact with the virus, a third of the students believed that the information should not be shared (4). This problem of social stigma is even more acute in certain parts of our country, where violence against healthcare workers has been recorded in responses to

suspicions of raising the risk of the spread of the virus in communities. It is of vital importance that the power of social media and other public information sources to be harnessed to raise awareness in communities to support their healthcare workers so that they may carry out their work without fear of harm.

Finally, we would like to focus on the global response of medical students in all countries who came forward ready to volunteer their services for the sake of their fellow man. A study from Uganda found that over 80% of medical students are willing to participate in the frontline response to COVID-19 if called upon (2). This enthusiasm among medical students to put their lives on the line in the face of this pandemic is heroic and makes it even more incumbent upon medical authorities to incorporate comprehensive training for these medical students, to make the best use of their abilities, while taking adequate protective measures.

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