

Light at the End of the Tunnel

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Each generation of modern medical professionals has been confronted with a certain set of challenges that defined their time, and each generation has overcome them with perseverance and ingenuity. It may be Fleming's discovery of penicillin in the 1920s overcoming the menace of bacterial infections, tissue cultures going mainstream in the 40s and 50s, the discovery of hitherto unknown antipsychotics and the double-helix DNA in the 50s to unveil the genetic mysteries, the oral rehydration therapy of the 60s and 70s as the most life-saving advance of 20th century, and more recently, the fight against challenge posed by AIDS. Our challenges have become increasingly complex, but each generation of scientists and doctors has been better equipped than their predecessors. We have the tools, the means, and the intent to tackle the ever-growing challenges facing us as a species. If history has taught us anything, it's that no matter the problems thrown at it, mankind prevails.

During 2020, the generation-defining fight has been the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. It has disrupted lives on a global scale [1], and people, more than ever, are looking at their doctors for guidance and aid. Our job, our responsibility, and our privilege as pediatricians, is to handhold our patients and their parents through this time. The wellbeing of the next generation of mankind is quite literally in our hands.

Children in India have been through something that none of us have, and it will require empathy and patience to understand what they need, to go through the transition back to things as they were. They've missed a big chunk of school, because of which they have rarely met friends or socialized. The natural build-up of immunity is at its lowest, and the related stress factor at its highest. Hospital visits are down, which means there may be a tremendous backlog of diagnosis and management of chronic illnesses, which would've been caught if not for the pandemic. Routine immunization has also suffered [2]. The economic impact has been hard, which will travel through parents' pockets to the

nutritional health of children, especially in the disadvantaged sections of our society. We, as a community of doctors, must be aware of these problems if we are to come up with policy and protocols to address them. It is by no means an easy task.

Yet, good news is around the corner. Vaccinations against COVID-19 have already begun in certain parts of the world [3], and India will soon follow. Mankind will pick itself back up, as it has done countless of times. It may take a while, since we don't know how long it'll take for herd immunity to kick in, or how fast the virus may adapt to the vaccines.

The Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP), in turn, must adapt. We must recognize that we aren't out of the woods yet, even though we're firmly on the right path. Precautions must be taken, and as doctors, we have to lead by example.

A starting point will be the annual Central Pedicon 2021. Since a large physical congregation of members is not possible because of the prevailing situation, we have planned to have a mix of limited physical gathering coupled with a large virtual participation to create a unique hybrid event, the Central IAP Pedicon 2021. The physical leg of this hybrid conference will be held at Mumbai from 4-7 February, 2021 and will include the annual IAP events such as the Shantilal C Sheth Oration, UG and PG quiz, award papers and also hold meetings of Office Bearers, Executive Board, and the General body. We look forward to host all our IAP members on a virtual platform in this conference. In keeping with the focus of IAP next year on early childhood development [4], the theme of this conference will be "Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development", to reflect the commitment of IAP to empower all parents and pediatricians to achieve an optimal and holistic development for children of India.

I am delighted to apprise the members of a partnership and collaboration forged between the IAP, World Health Organization (WHO), and the Unicef to

work together for the cause of early childhood development in the year 2021. The beginning of the year will be marked by IAP-WHO-Unicef Collaborative plenary sessions and a consultative meet during this hybrid conference. IAP-WHO-Unicef collaboration will also bring out a supplement of *Indian Pediatrics* devoted to ECD during 2021.

Digital education has been on the forefront of IAP activities in 2020. We hope to carry forward this momentum by establishing a digital center of excellence (DCOE) under the umbrella of Indian College of Pediatrics (ICP). This long cherished academic wing of IAP will finally start functioning in its earnest this year and will strive to achieve quality in all academic courses and fellowship being awarded by IAP and its subspecialty chapters.

In January, 2020, we conceived developing a set of Guidelines for parental education on various facets of children's day-to-day life both in health and disease. This was a long felt need of the parents in India. American Academy of Pediatrics has a devoted website on parental guidelines [5], but it was a felt demand to have India-centric parental guidelines. I am delighted to inform you that the final set of 101 Parental Guidelines prepared by more than 500 experts from all over India and abroad are almost ready to be launched. Starting first week of January, look out for release of these guidelines to all IAPians. The first set is prepared in English. Later, the plan is to translate all the guidelines in 15 Indian languages and disseminate across the length and breadth of the country to all parents who wish to read them.

There's strength in numbers. And there's strength in hope. If the 30,000 plus strong body of the IAP is set upon a hopeful future, I have belief that the challenges of the present can be dealt with effectively. Father of the Nation Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi put it in the simplest terms, '*The future depends on what we do in the present.*' That's as true now as it was when he said it.

Children are the future. And the future depends on our actions today. I quote from Jeffrey Fry "*Sometimes life seems a dark tunnel with no light at the end, but if you just keep moving forward, you will end up in a better place.*" Looking forward to work together and moving in the right direction.

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