How has the teamwork across the Anaesthetic Team been enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic?"

The covid pandemic has been a life changing experience for all. From wearing masks and social distancing to online shopping and queuing outside marketplaces, our habits have changed in every step that we take during the day, indoors or outdoors. Though every person has been affected by the pandemic, it has brought a great change to the hospitality sector. Hotels and restaurants have resorted to take away and deliveries while struggling to pay wages to staff whereas hospitals have been overloaded, staff over worked while constantly creating new beds for patients.

Anaesthetists have played a significant role in this pandemic, being at the fore front of saving lives of deteriorating patients. From managing patients in intensive care with severely affected and fibrosed lungs to facing challenges in intubation with hypoxic lungs. The pandemic not only challenged the skills but also questioned physiology and its applications to the cardiorespiratory system that we learnt in Millers. While trying to find solutions to the happy hypoxics, anaesthetists got into management as well, trying to plan and develop a safe environment for staff and patients and introduce and update new guidelines at work. Thus, the pandemic demanded multitasking with increased number of dedicated working hours. A tough task by the sounds of it, isn't it?

Anaesthetists did not back out to the challenges, we did not let tiredness get in the way but pushed further and far every day.
To wonder, what kept anaesthetists going? The oath when they became a doctor, a sheer dedication, an obsessive compulsive behaviour to get things in place or was it something more? All anaesthetists have the aforementioned traits but what's more important is the team work that came out as a highlight during these times of crisis. Battling through the rough times of burn out, facing deaths and being unanswerable to questions of what could have been done better to save this life can push doctors into depression and frustration. An anaesthetic trait of anticipating an unanticipated outcome brought in team work as the only reliable answer.

Team work for an anaesthetist is not restricted to working with teams in theatre or ITU, but it deals with doctors and nurses in ER, wards, managers, HR to porters and biochemistry and

haematology department. To summarise it, it deals with the entire hospital and its people. It may be difficult to wonder how relations can be maintained with so many people, to which the answer was politeness, kindness and most importantly, a smile. Through thick and thin, we were always seen smiling for we knew a doubt on our face would raise doubts in other minds. A smile acts as a motivation for all, to do it and get it right.

Social media like WhatsApp bloomed in our department. We made groups for the department, for consultants, trainees and nurses and ODPs. It was a great way to engage people and plan together. It also served as a great platform to share problems and see how people came out to support with all their hearts. Meetings were conducted through MS teams to keep everyone safe (social distancing) while addressing issues and planning development. In a way, we were truly just a call away always.

Where did the team work start - was it in ER in decision making and shifting or turning patients prone in ITU or managing rotas for the department and covering shifts in times of increased demands and sickness? It was everywhere! It was in every step we took! As we started the day, the briefing, the rounds, attending calls, we were all with the team. As the day progressed, planning care, anaesthetising, admitting and discharging, giving breaks for food, we were all a team. As the day ended, we walked together making sure everyone was alright. We not only handed care and plans but handed team work in handovers as well. It carried on day to day, building stronger, like strengthening nutrition by TPN, only with no adverse effects. From colleagues and professionals, we soon became friends and family. Everyone ensured no one felt alone and no one had a bad day.

With lockdown restrictions and travel bans, many of us couldn't meet family and friends which we considered time off work to cool down. But we developed new ways. We celebrated everyday together with gifts and food from the donations. We enhanced our cooking and baking skills and made new dishes to share. We got gifts, exchanged cards, not only on Christmas, but every other day. We discussed workouts at home and compared steps and motivated each other to do more than yesterday. We learnt to eat together on the same table, ensuring safe spacing and discuss kids, dogs, friends, spouses. Over months, even though we hadn't met anyone's family, we knew them all (and their faces from

Facebook and photos) and felt like one. With every relation, we built trust and strengthened our commitments.

There was always a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, laughter to share and a little kick to lift us all up. Team work made us stronger emotionally and physically. We built a family that grew in numbers but was stuck strong like the quick fix glue in arterial lines. The bond was as strong as a flexometallic tube that we can't break, yet as soft as cushions and padding for positioning. Covid strengthened our trust, motivated our ambition and made us explore sectors we hadn't explored clinically (skill wise and managerial capacities).

While there is enough to whine about the pandemic, we couldn't be grateful to it for creating bigger families at work. While we can't wait for the pandemic to end, we also can't wait to relive the new bonds in a different space outdoors, sharing wine instead of juice, playing games and hiking instead of checking photos, and to dance together and celebrate the new drug we invented called TEAM WORK!