

Samarpan



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ICAMN - Indian Cultural Association Of Minnesota icamn.org

President's Note

Quarterly Newsletter – Summer 2021

Dear Community Members,

Namaste! I hope you are having a wonderful summer. I'd like to start by congratulating all the students who've recently graduated from high school and/or college in Rochester and surrounding areas. School may be done, but there are many life lessons yet to be learned. Keep your heart and mind open as you embark on your next journey. I wish you all the best for the future.

On behalf of the ICAM board, I'd like to extend our best wishes to Dr. Suresh Kotagal, ICAM's Vice President, and to his wife, Nirmala, as they look forward to new beginnings in Florida. As Rochester residents for the past 21 years, they have worked to build and serve the community. Suresh was one of the main people involved in establishing the Hindu Samaj Temple, and has been instrumental in forming ICAM in the past year. He will continue to serve as Vice President, helping virtually from Florida. Our deep gratitude to both Nirmala and Suresh for their continued service to the community.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, ICAM has continued to conduct activities, virtually. ICAM-UTSAV 2021 was a success with almost 100 people watching the virtual show. The performance included professional dancers and singers from India, and we received excellent feedback from the community. We hope to have an in-person event in 2022, with more performances by professional artists.

Nearly 50 people attended the virtual health webinar—another successful event. Our fundraising efforts to help during the pandemic was a major accomplishment.

We continue to serve the community in many other ways—we have partnered with the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) and the Indian Association of Minnesota (IIAM) to meet our goals. ICAM is now a member of the Rochester nonprofit consortium, which will enhance foreseeable partnerships with other nonprofit organizations in our efforts to serve the community. As things start getting back to normal, we hope to organize in-person events and ICAM encourages the entire Rochester community to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

The application for 501(C)(3) has been approved for tax exempt status, and donors can now make tax-deductible contributions to ICAM. This is a major accomplishment as it can take up to 2 years for a newly formed organization to receive tax-exempt status—we achieved this within one year of establishing ICAM!

Thank you to the Board, our volunteers, and the community for helping ICAM grow further. Please continue to encourage friends and family to become members by visiting our website at icamn.org.

Best wishes,
Ajay Singh
President, ICAM Board.



Have a story for Samarpan? We welcome your submissions, including but not limited to

- First-person accounts, experiences, stories, essays
- Expert findings, reports on relevant topics
- Opinions, newsworthy insights
- Contributions are welcome from all, especially students and seniors

Guidelines for submission:

Articles must be original; they cannot have appeared elsewhere—in any form—in print or online.

All articles are rigorously edited and fact-checked, so it's important to include sources (in hyperlinks in the text or in parentheses).

We will work to verify the facts in your article, but as the writer, you bear the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of your work.

Writers are expected to take care to avoid political or workplace-related issues and any conflict of interest.

Include your contact information and a brief author bio: 30-50 words



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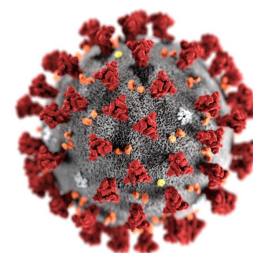
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COVID – A Tale of Two Pandemics

By Dr. Priya Sampathkumar

The first official case of COVID in the United States was reported on January 21, 2020. In the 17 months since then, USA has had over 33 million cases and 600,000 COVID deaths. In our own state of Minnesota, we have had 600,000 cases and 7500 deaths to date.

These cases occurred in a series of waves. Strategies to “flatten the curve” worked including cancellation of non-urgent medical care worked well at keeping the medical facilities in Southern MN from being overwhelmed. Collaboration between private medical institutions such as Mayo Clinic and public health authorities made COVID care accessible to everyone in the community and outcomes were better than the national averages. But COVID still highlighted another pandemic – that of inequity. In the US as a whole, COVID cases and hospitalization rates were higher in non-white populations and the death rate was almost two-fold higher. The data from Minnesota was similar. The death rate from COVID among white, non-Hispanic Minnesotans was 95/100,000 population. The death rate was considerably higher in Native Americans (255), Black Americans (236), Hispanics (210) and Asians (189). In addition to the direct medical impact of COVID on the health of the community, there have been indirect impacts including delayed care for chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and cancer care, mental health issues from social isolation and loss of wages and it is likely that these also impacted minority populations to a greater extent.



In the last few weeks, COVID cases in the US and in MN have been decreasing and restrictions have been gradually easing. Masks are now optional in many settings. Restaurants, bars, movie theaters are open, people are traveling to visit friends and family and life seems closer to normal than it has been since March of last year. This is largely due to adequate supplies of highly effective vaccines and the resources to vaccinate large numbers of people. 95% of the population that is 65+ years in Olmsted County, and 80% of the population that is 12 years and older (and therefore eligible for vaccination) has received at least one dose. Racial and ethnic disparities are less obvious with regards to vaccination, at least in part due to outreach by community organizations such as ICAM to dispel vaccine myths and promote vaccination.

As things have been improving in the US, India has been dealing with a catastrophic second wave. There was a lot of concern at the onset of the pandemic about the impact of COVID spread in densely populated nations like India. But India did remarkably well initially, due to very strict lockdowns at the national level. Reported cases remained relatively low as things gradually reopened. This led to complacency and complete relaxing of all precautions. Massive religious gatherings, huge election rallies in several states coupled with inadequate testing and rise of new variants with higher infectivity resulted in a meteoric rise in COVID in March 2021. Hospitals were completely overwhelmed in many parts of India and critical shortages of oxygen, medications and hospital beds led to a massive death toll. COVID cases have dropped sharply since the peak in the last week of May, but India continues to deal with the fallout of secondary bacterial and fungal infections in COVID survivors. What can we do to prevent another surge? So far COVID vaccines remain protective, and vaccination is the best single defense against COVID. Get vaccinated yourself (if you haven't already) and talk to friends/relatives/co-workers about COVID vaccination. Vaccines provide stronger and longer lasting protection than natural COVID infection, so you should get vaccinated even if you have had COVID. Get tested for COVID if you have new symptoms or have been exposed to COVID. Stay home when sick. Keep as healthy as possible – capitalize on the warm weather and make time to exercise outside. Take care of the routine doctor's appointments you put off during the last few months. Get any overdue preventive health tests and routine vaccines. And when Fall comes around, get the flu vaccine.

The delta variant that was responsible for the deadly second wave in India has now spread to over 75 countries including the US where it now accounts for approximately 10% of new COVID cases. This variant is 50% more infectious than the previously circulating strains and may also cause more severe infections. There are fears that this and other variants could lead to additional COVID surges.

Covid-19 Relief Efforts in India by ICAM Helps Save Lives *By Alka Mehra and Vidya Iyer*

India is amid a deadly second wave of COVID-19 since April of 2021. In the past couple months, the country has recorded approximately 28,572,500 cases and 340,719 deaths. Hospitals and medical facilities are still scrambling for oxygen, ICU beds and other medical equipment and thousands of citizens are still waiting outside hospitals and medical facilities waiting for care.

Indian Cultural Association of Minnesota (ICAM) contributed in its own little way to respond to this crisis in India by organizing a fundraiser to bridge the gap for medical oxygen shortage during this pandemic. The organization set up a “Go Fund Me” initiative to raise money and supply

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Covid-19 Relief Efforts in India by ICAM Helps Save Lives

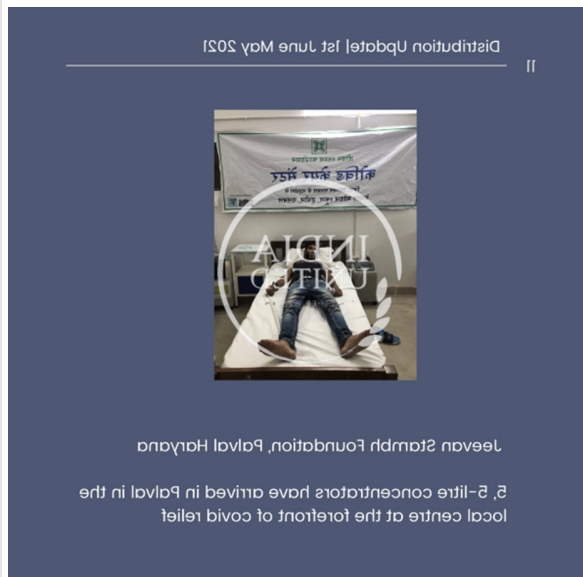
By Alka Mehra and Vidya Iyer

oxygen concentrators to various health care facilities and clinics all over India where the need was the greatest, especially in the marginalized communities. Some examples of ICAM fundraising impact are demonstrated in the attached pics from Jeevan Stambh Foundation in Palval, Haryana, who received 5 oxygen concentrators through our efforts and from CHC in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh, who received 1 concentrator.

These Oxygen concentrators were sourced from a manufacturer in India since they were better suited to Indian climate conditions. Moreover, there was a unique supply chain mechanism that was devised by the manufacturer and supplier to prevent hoarding by individuals with the means.

These machines were made available to needy patients along the lines of a **lending library mechanism** where each patient was able to use the machine as needed for a period of 5-10 days and once they had recovered, the machine was available for another needy patient.

The fundraising campaign was run for about 5 weeks, and it was a huge success. We raised approximately \$15,416 and have 7 oxygen concentrators currently circulating in various communities in India through these efforts. An additional of 10 concentrators are being made available this month to help mitigate the medical oxygen crisis in times of great need. We would like to thank the Rochester and surrounding communities for coming together to show their support and generosity and helping India during this crisis. We also want to express gratitude to entities matching donations.



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Resilience

By Dr. Amit Sood

Resilience is often defined as your ability to withstand and bounce back from adversity. However, I feel resilience is too complex and multifaceted to be captured in definitions. Resilience is best described as a story, or many stories.

The little boy who ran into the burning home to save his little sister displayed resilience. As did the railways employee who ran in front of the rushing train and saved a boy who had fallen on the tracks. My friend Carla's seventy-seven-year-old mother who announced her new diagnosis of Parkinsonism (that causes tremors) to her family by saying that her ordinary toothbrush had now become electronic, was also displaying resilience.



Resilience abounds in nature. The mango tree at my family home in India where the hotter it gets, the sweeter the mango becomes, displays resilience. So do the penguins that march hundreds of miles and endure the grueling winter for nourishing and raising their chicks. I can't help but be awed by the grit of the monarch butterflies, octopus moms, even the evergreens that withstood the Minnesota winter.

Pause for a moment and think of someone in your personal life who is strong and kind. This person has a can-do attitude. No one can beat this person's spirit or love of life. If you wish, you can close your eyes to think about one such person and open your eyes once a face or a name appears in your mind.

This person is resilient. Over almost two decades, I have been collecting resilience stories from all parts of the world. Three themes emerge that you might find interesting.

Resilient people are other-centric: Most resilient people have a strong prosocial purpose that drives their life.

Resilient people see problems as worthy challenges: The resilient people generally do not see obstacles as overwhelming obstructions. Instead, they see opportunities within those obstructions and continue striving forward, trying to make the best of their constraints.

Resilient people have a hope-filled model of the world, often anchored in faith. Their faith is inclusive and doesn't create artificial silos.

I was once privileged to take care of a petite eighty-seven-year-old lady in the ICU. Let's call her Emma. Emma had a very narrow aortic valve and was in heart failure. I was worried she wouldn't make it. Before I could even start helping her, she asked me to pull out a few pictures from her bag. Those pictures were of five young children. She was supporting these kids in different parts of the world with her small retirement income. Emma said, "Don't worry, doctor. Nothing will happen to me until I make sure these kids are taken care of."

Emma lived five more years after that episode, while most people with her diagnosis survive less than six months without surgery. Indeed, resilience research shows that the most resilient people have lower stress, better mental health, better physical health, nurturing relationships, and find their work more rewarding. The real good news is that resilience is a skill that, with practice, you can embody as a way of life.

The present ongoing pandemic has overloaded our brains with countless stories of suffering. No person has remained unaffected. Further, this has effectively doubled the prevalence of most mental health disorders. Even after we see this storm through the rear-view mirror and take a collective deep breath, we can rest assured that some other challenge will threaten us in the future. Across generations, stressors keep changing, while the stress endures. Thus, in addition to specific strategies to cope with the current stress, approaches to enhance overall resilience can help us respond to a wide variety of current and future stressors. Here are a few ideas that might help:

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Resilience

By Dr. Amit Sood

1. For fixable problems – address the issue at hand.
2. For non-fixable minor problems – ask yourself, will it matter in five years? If not, then the issue isn't worth taking space in your brain's real estate today.
3. For non-fixable major problems – feel validated in your concern, nurture self-compassion, seek help, think about your faith, address the addressable, and accept the rest.
4. For general improvement of resilience – take care of your physical health (diet, exercise, sleep), feel grateful for the simple and the ordinary, focus on your purpose, forgive to free space in your brain, and build stronger relationships.

I pray you never have to face adversity again. But knowing that adversities will continue to trespass into our lives, I also pray that you always find the strength and resilience to withstand the hardships, bounce back quickly, and grow because of the challenges that come your way.

High School Graduation – A Culture Trip

By Kanaaz Pereira

There is a palpable excitement as Fall approaches. Families across the country are getting ready to send their students to college for the first time.

To the world outside, the house with kids whose parents are first-generation Indian immigrants, everything appears normal. But take a look inside and you'll find there is yelling, shouting, cajoling, and even the occasional psychotherapy session going on.

I decided to ask a few high school graduates—kids with first-generation Indian parents—to share their insights about the journey that led to this momentous occasion: completing high school.

“Kanaaz aunty,” (I had to interrupt right there and then. I was confused when they called me aunty! To my surprise, they provided several reasons but that's a story for another day), “our parents are so predictable. We can always tell what they're going to say every time we make eye contact.”

“What?” I asked.

“Why are you not studying?”

To share the plethora of experiences and hilarious moments with our readers, I've embedded their insights in a fictional narrative of a “typical Indian family” with a high school graduate.

Ajay: Well, at least I've finished my application forms and essays.

Dad: *Beta*, before you seal the covers better give them to me. Just to make sure you get a call from all the colleges.

Ajay: How are you going to do that?

Dad: Very simple—with each application, just mention that I will make a generous donation to the college.

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Ajay: Can you stop calling me Ajay? My name is Jay! All my friends and even my teachers call me Jay. And dad, are you trying to bribe the admissions officer?? Jeez! I don't believe this! We'll end up in prison!

Mother: We are only thinking about what's best for you. My main worry is that you will not get good food in college. I'm going to pack a suitcase full of healthy snacks...khakhra, kachori... you can eat whenever you're hungry.

Ajay: Please mom! The campus has a cafeteria and there are many fast-food places nearby.

Mom: *Chhee!* Why do you want to waste money with all this non-veg food? And remember, if you get an upset stomach, no need to take any drugs. I'll pack some *Hajmola* for you.

(Digestive tablet containing a variety of Ayurvedic herbs, considered a cure-all for most Indian digestive ailments.)

Ajay: Mom, I've been eating at these places all my life, so will you please stop this nonsense.

Mother: But at least don't drink...and best not to have any girlfriends.

Ajay: Mom, I'm not a baby anymore! All my friends' parents let their kids do whatever they want! Why are you so paranoid?

Mother: Beta, these girls know that Indian boys are a good catch. What if they "trap you" and then you have to get married at such a young age?

(On the rare occasion that kids are watching TV with their parents and a sex scene comes on, they have to act shocked...like they don't know what sex is.)

Ajay: OMG! Don't worry mom. I have protection.

Mother: Thank God! At least I know we put some sense in you. Only *you* can protect yourself, don't let bad influences control you.

Ajay: Mom!

Dad: We were also your age once, Ajay. We know how these things work.

(Indian parents know everything about their kids' life—at least they like to think so! They prove this by stating that they too were young once. Every sentence will start with Hamare zamane mein...never mind that things might have changed in the years since then.)

Mom: Just remember that good marks are everything. Look at Rohan, our neighbour's son. He was a topper in college and now he's a millionaire.

(The Bible says, 'Love thy neighbor', but I'm certain that every Indian child's nightmare is the neighbor's kid or a friend's kid. Every time they get a grade below 100%, we make sure to remind our children about someone else's kid's performance.)



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Ajay: Nowadays employers don't look only at grades. They want intelligent persons who will make a difference in life.

Dad: That's why we are spending so much money to send you to a good college. You can be anything you want to be, like a doctor, lawyer, engineer...

(Of course, we encourage our children by allowing them to pursue a very select list of career choices.)

Mom: You have to call every day, okay? Why did you leave the family WhatsApp chat? Today you leave WhatsApp group, tomorrow maybe you'll leave your parents!

(As an Indian mom, I will admit to my thought process—

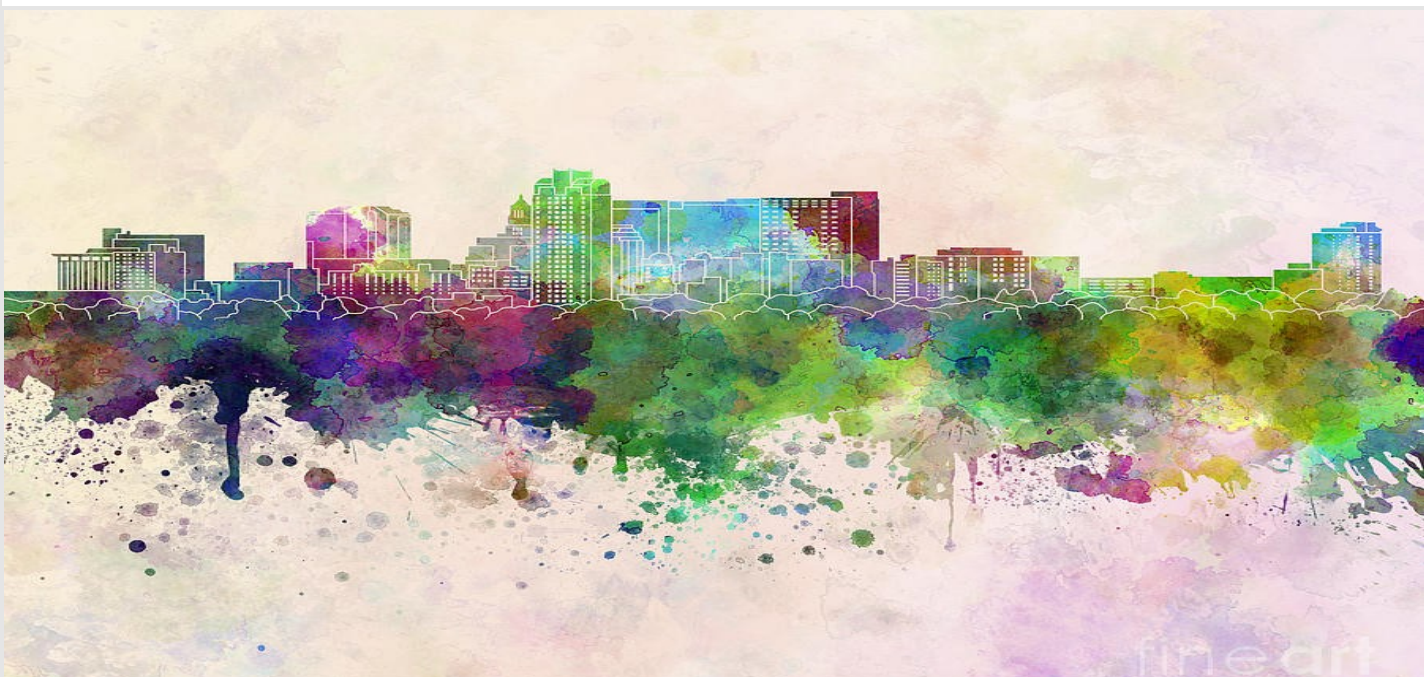
After the 1st missed call: He/she must be busy. After 2nd missed call: Where is he/she? They can't be that busy! After the 3rd missed call: I'm calling the police! What if he/she is in danger!)

Remember the psychotherapy I mentioned at the start? My discussion with the graduates felt strangely cathartic!

Being a first-generation Indian mom, I'd be remiss if I were to end without offering a bit of wisdom to our children...

Kids, we (parents) get it, but we're not going to give up on you. Because you will go from loving us, to hating us, but finally, you'll thank us.

That's what my parents used to say!



Rochester skyline in water color by Pablo Romero