

Public Perception on Health Systems' Response towards Early Phase Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic COVID-19 arrived abruptly and expanded in numbers exponentially, demanding health systems to respond not just aggressively, but also in a timely. The outbreak is currently ongoing and continues to devastate many health systems. The response taken during the initial phase of the outbreak is indicative of the preparedness of a health system. To strengthen and improve implementation measures, there is a need to identify issues in health system response. Capturing these issues through the lens of people directly affected by the outbreak's casualty is invaluable. A study was conducted to explore the public perception of issues affecting the Malaysian health system's response in managing COVID-19 during the initial phase. A mixed-method study was conducted among Malaysians aged eighteen (18) years and above using an online survey and open-ended interview. A WHO COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) document consisting of eight (8) strategy pillars developed to guide countries to manage COVID-19 effectively was adapted as the survey. The survey was distributed through an official website, social media platforms, and email to a few identified key informants. In addition to participating in the online survey, the informants were asked to rate the performance of the health system, along with open-ended questions on COVID-19 management. Content analysis was conducted, followed by a thematic grouping of the issues. We report here on the qualitative findings of the open-ended responses. The study involved seventy-six (76) respondents (members of the public) from various backgrounds who had responded to the open-ended questions. The issues that were reported were grouped into multiple domains and sub-domains under each of the eight (8) strategy pillars. Amongst the many issues identified by the respondents was the lack of coordination and collaboration across multi sectors, agencies and experts; whereby respondents highlighted many collaborative areas needing more concerted effort including establishing multisectoral decision-making committees involving all crucial key actors. Additionally, the public perception was for a greater need to work with experts in data analysis, engagement with the community and relevant NGOs in alleviating the burden faced by the public; sharing testing costs with the private sector and coordinating workforce mobilization more efficiently. Another issue raised in all pillars was the lack of crucial guidance and resources, including the need for guidelines beyond positive case management and optimization of readily available sources in the country such as private laboratories, creative industries, and community representatives. The credibility of leaders in being accountable and gaining trust from the public was another issue repetitively mentioned under most of the strategy pillars; whereby respondents highlighted the need to improve the competency and stringency of implementations. Finally, many highlighted that the governing body needed a more effective and transparent avenue for feedback and the implementation of improvements. This study provides a judicious approach to understanding the issues of Malaysia's health systems' response to the Covid 19 pandemic based on public perception. The issues highlighted in this study could assist policymakers to understand the state of preparedness and weakness of Malaysia's health system in managing the Covid 19 pandemic. It serves as an opportunity to focus on areas to be strengthened during and beyond the current pandemic and consequently contribute to a more resilient health system in facing future pandemics.

Keywords: health system, public perception, COVID-19, Malaysia