

What We Can Learn about the Pandemic from the Experience of Healthcare Workers

Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, a surgeon at Boston's 75,000-employee Brigham and Women's Hospital and a well-known author has written five books, including *Being Mortal*, which was made into a movie.

The son of Indian immigrant physicians, Gawande did his undergraduate work at Stanford, was a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, and completed his medical degree at Harvard University. As a professor at Harvard's Medical School and its School of Public Health, Gawande has led a number of public health initiatives in the United States and overseas.

Based on his experience with the coronavirus pandemic to date, Gawande penned an article, "Amid the Coronavirus Crisis, Regimen for Reentry," which was published in *The New Yorker* magazine on May 13, 2020. The entire article is available here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/medical-dispatch/amid-the-coronavirus-crisis-a-regimen-for-reentry>. The Mayflower Community provides for you a summary.

Gawande asks and answers the question, "Is there any place that has figured out a way to open and have employees work safely, with each other and with their customers?" He feels that the healthcare industry has affirmatively answered that question. He calls this the "combination therapy"—five elements when used, drastically reduce the spread of the infection. Here they are:

1. Hygiene – The key is frequency, which is "...washing or sanitizing your hands every time you go into or out of a group environment." Disinfecting surfaces is also important.
2. Distancing – We need to avoid as many situations as possible where people are near each other—meetings, elevators, hallways, standing in line, group singing. Exposure time is a contributing factor. Less than 15 minutes together is the goal.
3. Screening – Daily checking for symptoms, especially for fever, is critical. However, "...infectivity starts before symptoms do." Thus, testing, when practical, enhances screening.
4. Face Masks – "Evidence of the benefits of mandatory masks is now overwhelming." According to Gawande, this is "source control—blocking the spread of respiratory droplets from a person with active, but perhaps, unrecognized infection." There is a variety of masks available, but none are fail-safe.
5. Culture – The primary source of infection diagnosed in Gawande's hospital is the community, usually the family. There must be a desire to keep others safe, not just ourselves.

More details about each of these elements are contained in the full article, a worthwhile read.

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