

Correspondence

COVID-19 in Peru: the need to pay attention to the high number of police deaths due to the pandemic

We have read with great interest the editorial titled “Facing the future—what lessons could we learn from Covid-19?”¹ and we agree with the message of learning the lessons of this pandemic, looking ahead and planning for the future. Likewise, the future could refer to months and even years later, however in such a changing scenario and where immediate needs are urgent, we are not allowed to wait and we are forced to learn and share experiences with other countries to face the near future.

With more than 80 000 cases, 2267 deaths and only 1031 ICU beds for 33 million inhabitants, Peru is one of the Latin American countries with the greatest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic despite the early measures taken by the government.² Through a national emergency declaration, the Peruvian government established a quarantine from March 16,³ which will run until May 24, however, to date there is still no stabilization and reduction in the number of new cases and deaths. Despite this, on May 11 the gradual reactivation of economic activities began in the national territory approved by Supreme Decree No. 080-2020-PCM.⁴ According to experts, this should not only be allowed gradually but also by deploying extraordinary preventive measures to mitigate the progression of the disease and prevent the collapse of our precarious health system.

With the declaration of a state of emergency, the police and armed forces were displaced to the streets to ensure order and internal security in order to avoid the spread of the disease in the population. However, even under quarantine, it has been possible to observe scenarios in which disorder, crowding and non-compliance with the social distance between the population prevail in places such as markets, public transport and groups of people returning from the cities to the countryside. This not only increases the risk of transmission between citizens but also puts at risk the police who, in carrying out their work, try to enforce the government’s regulations with inadequate precautionary measures and insufficient protection.

On April 25, 1300 positive cases and 11 deaths from COVID-19 were reported in police officers nationwide. On May 6, the number of infections in this group amounts to 4098 and 82 deaths, and the figures continue to grow.² These

numbers exceed those reported by other countries in terms of deaths of police officers and overcome the 23 health professionals who died in China⁵ and to any other Peruvian professional group where three doctors have died until May 3⁶. These deaths reflect the risk to which the Peruvian police are exposed and call for reflection on the measures that must be implemented in this professional group and that can serve as experience for other countries.

Despite the complex scenario, with the opening of the first phase of reactivation of economic activities on May 11 in Peru and as the pandemic progresses, the government’s commitment is required to ensure that the Peruvian police can have access to protective equipment in the appropriate number, quality and frequency, as well as professional training for the optimal use of this equipment. Furthermore, massive testing and timely care must be ensured for this professional group. In a complementary way, it is crucial that massive and constant prevention campaigns of COVID-19 are carried out to the population through the various means to initiate an awareness process, which, added to the government’s provisions, can add to the fight for the containment of this disease.

Disclosure of Interest

The authors declare no competing conflict interests.

Contribution to Authorship

AHV conceived the study. All authors drafted the manuscript, and critically reviewed, and approved the final manuscript. All authors assume responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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