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Private hospitals support and collaborate with Government in battle against COVID-19

THE Association of Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes (APHNH) in a statement to media said they are fully committed to and will continue to be a contributing force to the healthcare services in the country, in this critical time of the coronavirus pandemic. To this effect, they have and will continue to diligently follow the Government and health ministry directives in the fight against the spread, diagnosis and treatment.

Health being an essential service, private hospitals are working full-on and round the clock, in ensuring the level of care that patients expect. They reiterate that their emergency services plus other outpatient and inpatient clinical facilities will continue to provide the services as usual, thereby reducing the burden on the Government health sector, which is now focussed on mobilising facilities to take on COVID-19 infected patients.

The Association reiterates that they are supportive of and laud the efforts of the Government-appointed Coronavirus Prevention Task Force and health ministry in these adverse and demanding times.

The private hospitals around the country have urgently responded to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, having taken stringent steps to manage flow of patients in their hospitals. Fundamental to this has been their priority in triaging patients and visitors – the process of rapid identification of COVID-19 suspected patients and directing them to assigned government hospitals, provision of personal protective equipment to hospital staff, masks to suspect patients, adherence to stringent infection control protocols and guidelines to ensure safety of all patients, visitors, staff and the community.

Following a Ministry of Health directive on 13 March, private hospitals are not admitting patients suspected of or having symptoms of COVID-19; instead they are being directed to one of the government hospitals designated by the Ministry of Health for COVID-19 treatment. Some private hospitals have even transported suspect patients free of charge and are offering this service continuously.

To-date, COVID-19 PCR test-

ing is not being carried out by any of the member hospitals of the Association as an OPD test as per the Ministry of Health instructions, the statement clarifies.

In a circular dated 18 March, the Ministry of Health permitted certain private hospitals which are equipped with molecular diagnostic testing facilities, to conduct COVID-19 PCR confirmatory tests on admitted patients, while adhering to stipulated conditions. The circular further requests that tests be conducted on patients who are admitted to the hospital.

However, the Association is of the view that such a test should be done as an Out Patient (OP) service under stringent quality guidelines since the private hospitals are not permitted to admit Covid-19 suspected patients.

Association of Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes President Dr. Lakith Peiris said, "Our membership strongly recommends aggressive COVID-19 PCR testing to either reverse the outbreak we expect in the future in Sri Lanka, or slow down and keep infected cases at a low level.

He said testing should be

made a priority, taking learnings from other countries that ramped up testing capacity very early during the outbreak and were able to contain the infection.

"On behalf of the Association I wish to recognise with gratitude the leadership by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in mobilising the country's resources in quickly establishing the Coronavirus Prevention Task Force. Our grateful thanks to the Minister of Health and Director General Health Services, the medical and healthcare professionals, healthcare workers and caregivers, to the armed forces and police for their yeoman service plus the media for keeping the public informed and aware, all of which is duly acknowledged and greatly appreciated," added Dr. Peiris.

With over 150 private hospitals and nursing homes in the country, private healthcare has been playing a complimentary role to the public healthcare in Sri Lanka, particularly in bringing in newest technologies and outstanding clinical outcomes. By providing super-speciality, tertiary care, many of these hospitals fill a gap and afford a choice to the patient.