

the 225 patients admitted with COVID-19 between July and October 2020, 98 patients (44%) received dexamethasone.

In the face of a pandemic with rapidly evolving data, internal guidelines had a significant impact on the prescribing patterns of the wide range of empiric COVID-19 therapeutics because the validity of these agents was still being evaluated and national consensus guidelines were not yet available. Successful implementation of local guidelines is attributed to a small number of dedicated COVID-19 providers, daily huddles with providers, teaching conferences, and incorporation of care-plan pathway into the electronic medical record. We acknowledge that the lower volume of COVID-19 cases in our region provided a more conducive environment for a meticulous and thoughtful process for guidelines development and implementation. These data exemplify the need for local champions to synthesize available evidence with scientific rigor and implement national guidelines. The limitations of this study include the lack of direct attribution of the internal guidelines to prescribing patterns, but the distribution of medication utilization over time suggests that providers integrated local guidance to inform treatment decisions.

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The first use of face mask in the history of medicine

Ali Taghizadieh MD¹, Javad Ghazi-Sha'rbaf PhD², Reza Mohammadinasab PhD³  and Saeid Safiri PhD^{4,5} 

¹Tuberculosis and Lung Disease Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran, ²Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Faculty of Theology, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University, Tabriz, Iran, ³Department of History of Medicine, School of Traditional Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran, ⁴Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran and ⁵Rahat Breath and Sleep Research Center, Aging Research Institute, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

To the Editor—Since human life began, epidemics have been a threat to human health.¹ Today, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread almost all over the entire world, and apparently one of the most important ways to prevent the transmission of severe acute respiratory coronavirus virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is by wearing a face mask.² A face mask largely prevents the transfer of airborne particles to the human respiratory system and can therefore play a significant role in preventing the spread respiratory viruses during epidemics.^{3,4}

Interestingly, the mask has been used since ancient times in Iran; however, it should not be confused with the clothing used for women's face veil. The word equivalent to the mask in ancient and medieval Iran was *panam* or *pandam*, which is also mentioned

in the Avesta,⁵ the holy book of Zoroastrians, in the religious rituals of the followers of the ancient prophet of Iran.⁶ The Iranian word *panam* is used in most middle and modern Iranian languages and dialects. This word in the Avestan language means holder and keeper against something, and the Pahlavi Persian language includes the words *padam*, *pandam*, and *phanom*.

According to Pahlavi texts, the *panam*, now called the veil by Iranian Zoroastrians, refers to 2 pieces of white cotton cloth that are hung over the mouth and tied with 2 ribbons at the back. This small cotton curtain, which according to the Pahlavi interpretation of the description in the Avesta, should be 2 inches below the mouth and should be used when the priest performs a religious ceremony in front of the sacred fire. In fact, the use of *panam* was to prevent the breath and steam of the mouth, which was considered polluted, from reaching the sacred element of fire. Therefore, it was a religious device of priests.⁶

Also, ancient Iranians who were honored by the king had wear a *panam* in front of their mouths to show respect for the king.

Authors for correspondence: Reza Mohammadinasab and Saeid Safiri. Emails: Rmn.nasab@tbzmed.ac.ir; safiris@tbzmed.ac.ir

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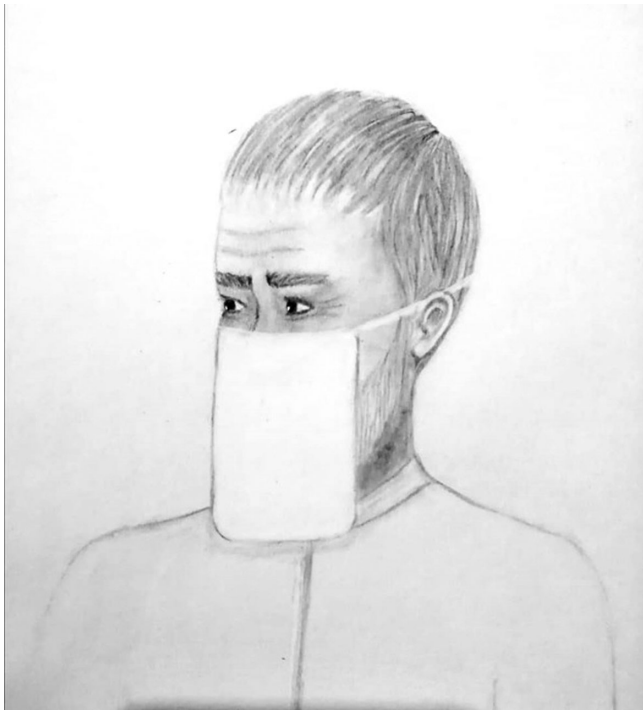


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of face mask by Iranian Zoroastrians.

Ancient Iranian physicians, after observing and treating a patient with an infectious disease, did not immediately treat another patient; first, they cleaned themselves as much as possible to prevent transmission of the disease. During treatment, they wore a scarf or cloth to prevent contamination. The cloth, which covered the face from the protrusion of the nose to under the chin and fastened with strings at the back of the head, seems to be very similar to today's surgical masks (Fig. 1).^{7,8}

The constant medical use of *panam* is also recorded throughout the Middle Ages. One of the most famous physicians of the 15th century, Baha al-Dawla Razi, recommended that people wrap a piece of cloth around their airways and soak it in vinegar, onion, and garlic to prevent the spread of diseases (Fig. 2).⁹ This recommendation seems to be the most significant medical advice to prevent respiratory diseases in Iranian medicine.^{8,10}

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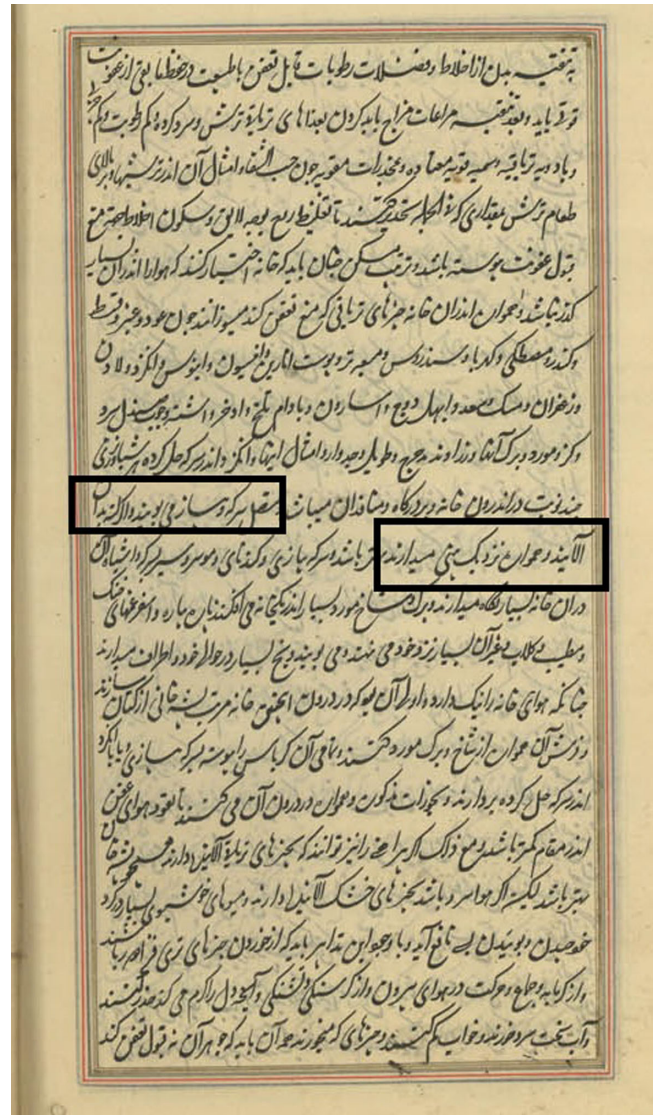


Fig. 2. Mask use instructions in the 15th century suggested by Baha al - Dawla Razi (<http://172.17.20.22:8888/site/catalogue/491189>).

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