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India West

Indian American Nonprofit Sewa Int'l Expands Work on COVID-19 Response in U.S., Releases \$10K to Run its Hotlines

- India-West Staff Reporter - Mar 17, 2020



A passenger arriving from Brussels wearing a mask to protect herself from the new coronavirus talks on the phone in the international arrivals zone at Dulles airport outside Washington March 13, 2020. (Eric Baradat/AFP via Getty Images)

“A team of 20 physicians is helping Sewa in providing free advice through Sewa coronavirus helpline. Over 400 volunteers in 20 major cities in the country are working tirelessly to put up a formidable community response at this difficult time,” Swadesh Katoch, vice president for disaster relief at Sewa, said in a news release.

“Local businesses and medical professionals are offering their services to the community most times pro bono through Sewa International. Sewa volunteers are providing multiple services, including offering and delivering free food, and help for the elderly in grocery shopping, doctor’s visits, etc., and help to those who are faced with travel and visa issues. We are also offering family therapist calls for helping parents deal with children, anxiety and stress,” Katoch added.

“Sewa is also helping people with COVID-19 like symptoms to meet with doctors. In a few cases our Family Services volunteers are working with friends and family of the patients who are in

self-quarantine or being tested for COVID-19. Sewa is running a daily Facebook Live campaign to spread awareness about preventing the infection,” said Katoch.

Sewa teams from various chapters across the country are working with Indian Consulates to help families obtain visas to travel to India in emergency situations, it said.

Sewa has published FAQs on its website – www.sewausa.org – to answer questions about visa and travel restrictions, said Achalesh Amar, director for disaster relief at Sewa.

“Sewa has created a task force to handle various economic and social issues that may arise due to this pandemic. As many schools in the U.S. are temporarily closed, parents from the under-privileged neighborhoods are being asked by the school administration to visit schools to collect their children’s food stamps. We are working on finding out how to help in such situations,” Amar said. “Sewa Disaster Relief Team is also planning to conduct webinars to spread awareness on how to prevent the infection. We are also publishing videos from qualified physicians on the subject,” he said.

Based on the recommendations of the taskforce, Sewa International has activated a helpline for non-medical advice at 203-872-SEWA (203-872-7392) for the East Coast; 302-330-SEWA (302-330-7392) for the West Coast; 281-909-SEWA (281-909-7392) for the Southwest; and 708-872-SEWA (708-872-7392) for the Midwest.

Sewa International president Sree Sreenath added that the nonprofit organization is also assisting Indian students in the U.S.

“There are over 250,000 students from India studying in U.S. universities. More than 300 U.S. universities have closed, including some who have moved instructions to a virtual mode, and even shut their dorms. Sewa has fielded calls from Indian foreign students from such universities who are finding it difficult to cope up emotionally, health wise, and financially,” said Sreenath, who is an academic at a major research university in Ohio. “We even had a couple of concerned parents call us from India.”

Sewa International is also taking the initiative of conducting regular webinars and distributing flyers with concise information from various sources. These flyers offer information about the difference between flu and COVID-19, preventive measures and techniques to reduce anxiety.

Indian American doctors, meanwhile, are on the frontlines of the fight against Coronavirus which has claimed over 70 lives and infected over 3,800 in the U.S.

The influential community, reports PTI, has commended the steps being taken by the President Donald Trump-led administration in tackling the outbreak.

“The Trump administration’s proactive handling of the coronavirus situation is commendable,” Dr. Narendra Kumar, former president of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, said in a statement issued by Al Mason, a New York-based advisor on global real estate investments and education institutions, who over the weekend connected over 1,000 reputed Indian American doctors from both the Democratic and Republican parties to get their feedback on the handling of the COVID-19 issue, as per PTI.

Over 100,000 Indian American doctors practice in the U.S. In view of the crisis, a large number of Indian American doctors, including those serving in the rural areas, are working round the clock, said Mason.

The White House Task Force on Coronavirus has put together all the necessary resources to contain the spread of the disease and prevented an otherwise worse situation, PTI quoted Dr. Kumar, a practicing otolaryngologist and sleep medicine specialist in Michigan, as saying.

A recipient of the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, Kumar said closing of the border, travel restrictions and bans and finally the declaration of national emergency were done appropriately.

Dr. Dilip B. Viswanath, a cardiologist from Delaware Valley, noted that closing borders will help reduce transmission.

“Although everybody is concerned about being/getting tested I worry that a negative test may create a false sense of security when one can just as easily be exposed the next day or even the same day. Agreeably a positive would presumably change behavior and hence reduce transmission,” he was quoted as saying by PTI.