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COVID-19: Protecting Healthcare Workers is a priority

Short title

Protecting Healthcare Workers

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Abstract

In Italy, more infections among healthcare personnel than in China were recorded. As of April 05, 2020 12,252 health workers in Italy have tested positive for COVID-19, making up 10% of Italy's COVID-19 cases; furthermore, 80 medical doctors and 25 nurses have died. Protecting healthcare workers is crucial in order not to amplify the COVID-19 epidemics. Moreover, relocating the public health emergency response from the hospitals to the territory, by integrating the hospital into an overall epidemic response, is a priority for contrasting further COVID-19 waves.

Key words: hospital prepadness; healthcare workers; COVID 19

Dear Editor,

We have very much appreciated the letter by Zhou et al. ^[1] about the call for protecting Chinese healthcare workers while fighting the 2019 Novel Coronavirus. The authors recognized the lack of awareness and training, the shortage of Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs), and the lack of point-of-care diagnostic tests for healthcare workers as the most important sources for the spreading of the infection. In Italy, more infections among healthcare personnel than in China were recorded. As of April 05, 2020 12,252 health workers in Italy have tested positive for COVID-19, making up 10% of Italy's COVID-19 cases ^[2]; furthermore, 80 medical doctors and 25 nurses have died. It is worth noting that official figures probably underestimate the real impact of COVID-19 on Italian healthcare staff, because many healthcare workers have not been tested and a large majority of coronavirus infections do not result in symptoms or remain paucisymptomatic ^[3]. In Italy, healthcare operators are facing the same issues that Zhou has highlighted in the Chinese hospitals. SARS-COV-2 has a high transmissibility rate in indoor environments and, therefore, asymptomatic patients admitted in the hospitals without respiratory symptoms have probably propagated the virus to unaware and unprotected health operators in departments other than infectious diseases. Healthcare workers have in turn infected other patients, visitors and staff amplifying the infection. It is well-known that hospital may amplify an epidemic and epidemics may overwhelm a hospital's capacity to deliver healthcare services ^[4]. Therefore, protecting healthcare workers is a priority, in addition to general lockdown and social distancing measures in order to alleviate the burden on the hospitals. However, in absence of effective therapies and vaccination, before the onset of further COVID-19 waves, it is important to relocate the public health emergency response from the hospitals to the territory, by integrating the hospital into an overall epidemic response ^[4]. In this regard, communication and mass-media information campaigns for the public are crucial.

References

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