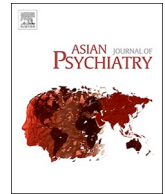




Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



Letter to the Editor

Patients with chronic illness urgently need integrated physical and psychological care during the COVID-19 outbreak

*Letters to the Editor,*

With the global outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (Wang et al., 2020), different quarantine policies have been implemented in different countries in order to control the epidemic in time. In this circumstance, patients with chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, active cancer, diabetes, stroke, dementia, schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, and so on, would suffer from emotional disturbance, anxiety, anger, confusion, and stigma as summarized by Brooks et al. (2020) because of sudden separation from loved ones, shortage of living supplies, the loss of freedom, and uncertainty over disease status. In addition, some patients have been confronted with difficulties in routine medical treatments due to delayed transportation and shortages of medicines and human resources in hospitals (Pellino and Spinelli, 2020). What's more, in this epidemic the mortality rate in elderly patients with chronic diseases is the highest. The data from China and Italy showed that the presence of these comorbidities might have increased the risk of mortality independent of COVID-19 infection (Graziano et al., 2020). So some old patients with chronic diseases dare not go to hospital. All these situations increase the possibility of relapse or even death.

Though it is known that socioeconomic disadvantage is a risk factor for many diseases, and that policy and health-care practice addressing psychological health issues in social context and early in the life course could be effective strategies (Kivimäki et al., 2020), however, even in daily clinical work, many psychological problems encountered by patients with chronic diseases will be neglected, not to mention in the current stressful epidemic.

The abilities of medical care in the epicenter would be greatly decreased because most medical staffs are busy for combating the epidemic as it happened at Hubei province in China from Jan to March in 2020. That is why by February 28, 330 medical teams with more than 40 thousand medical staff had been sent to Hubei Province to support the local health service, of whom 400~500 are psychiatrists. During two month from around January 22, a few of patients with chronic diseases can only consult doctors through the online platform, mainly about their physical status. Even obtained the suggestions from doctors, there would be other problem exist that shortage of medications because of stopped transportation, which resulted in the treatment discontinuation.

Besides the physical care, psychological care for these patients with chronic diseases still needs to provide timely. Even though there are lots of online psychological self-help services, however, it can only be a general consultation, and it is difficult for these patients to get diagnosis and treatment from mental health perspective. What is more, many questions remain unanswered with regards to online mental health services in low and middle-income countries (Yao et al., 2020).

While the epidemic continues to ravage most of countries, becoming

a worldwide public health emergency, and social isolation will be required for the whole society, the patients with chronic severe diseases would suffer from more and more difficulties. Now the outbreak is under control for China since the middle of March, many patients flood into hospitals seeking for help, however, because some medical staffs from other provinces are still in Hubei or in the quarantine last for 14 days, in addition to the shortage of medical supplies, so medical physicians can only take care of some patients physically. In this context, psychiatrists can play pivotal role in supporting the well-being of those affected and their families, the at-risk healthcare staff as well as the public (Banerjee, 2020), including the patients with chronic severe diseases. Therefore it is necessary and urgent to address the comprehensive physical and psychological intervention for the vulnerable population during the epidemic.

Funding

There is no any funding source.

Author contributorship

CYK, XDZ, JZY contributed to the conception of the manuscript, and wrote the manuscript. SRY, JY, LX collected the materials and data.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all health workers who are battling with the epidemic.

References

- Banerjee, Debanjan, 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak: crucial role the psychiatrists can play. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 50, 102014.
- Brooks, S.K., Webster, R.K., Smith, L.E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., Rubin, G.J., 2020. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *Lancet* 395 (10227), 912–920. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8).
- Graziano, Onder, Giovanni, Rezza, Silvio, Brusaferro, 2020. Case-fatality rate and characteristics of patients dying in relation to COVID-19 in Italy. *JAMA*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.4683>.
- Kivimäki, M., Batty, G.D., Pentti, J., Shipley, M.J., Sipilä, P.N., Nyberg, S.T., Suominen, S.B., Oksanen, T., Stenholm, S., Virtanen, M., Marmot, M.G., Singh-Manoux, A., Brunner, E.J., Lindbohm, J.V., Ferrie, J.E., Vahtera, J., 2020. Association between socioeconomic status and the development of mental and physical health conditions in adulthood: a multi-cohort study. *Lancet Public Health* 5 (3), e140–e149. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(19\)30248-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30248-8).
- Pellino, G., Spinelli, A., 2020. How COVID-19 outbreak is impacting colorectal cancer patients in Italy: a long shadow beyond infection. *Dis. Colon Rectum*. <https://doi.org/>

10.1097/DCR.0000000000001685.

Wang, C., Horby, P.W., Hayden, F.G., Gao, G.F., 2020. A novel coronavirus outbreak of global health concern. *Lancet* 395 (10223), 470–473.

Yao, Hao, Chen, Jianhua, Xu, Yifeng, 2020. Rethinking online mental health services in China during the COVID-19 epidemic. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 50, 102015.

Chuanyuan Kang, Shuran Yang

Department of Psychosomatic Medicine, Shanghai East Hospital, Tongji University School of Medicine, Shanghai, 200120, China

Jing Yuan, Li Xu

Department of Psychiatry, The Second Affiliated Hospital of Kunming

Medical University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650101, China

Xudong Zhao¹

Department of Psychosomatic Medicine, Shanghai East Hospital, Tongji University School of Medicine, Shanghai, 200120, China

Jianzhong Yang^{*1}

Department of Psychiatry, The Second Affiliated Hospital of Kunming Medical University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650101, China

E-mail address: jzhyang2004@163.com.

* Corresponding author at: 374 DianMian Road, Department of Psychiatry, The Second Affiliated Hospital of Kunming Medical University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650101, China.

¹ XDZ and JZY contributed equally to this work.