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.
Working in the emergency and inpatient COVID-19 special wards: A different experience for Iranian psychiatric trainees amid the outbreak

On 19 February, first COVID-19 case was reported officially by Iranian government, and Iranian health care system included physicians became one the most involved healthcare systems all around the globe (Ashrafi-Rizi and Kazempour, 2020; Shalbafan and Khademoreza, 2020; Zandifar and Badrfam, 2020). Aftermath, all of hospitals as well as outpatient clinics and their staffs around Iran involved hastily in this unpredictable outbreak.

Given that almost all of main and referral hospitals in big cities of Iran are academic hospitals which are affiliated to universities of medical sciences, medical education system should be involved necessarily. Therefore, almost all of medical faculty members, postgraduate medical trainees and medical interns have had to deal with this new complicated situation.

In case of Iran University of Medical sciences, one of the biggest medical universities in Tehran, after two weeks authorities decided to invite all of medical faculty members as well as medical trainees, regardless to their specialty to shift-work in the emergency and inpatient COVID-19 special wards. It seemed to be a necessary action considering increasing frustration and sickened number of first-line physician warriors such as emergency, infectious diseases and internal physicians in the outbreak.

Following this decision, 12 psychiatric trainees were scheduled to visit patients with COVID-19, and a shift was placed for each.

Before the starting of the shift, written protocols of COVID-19 management and protection protocols were sent to trainees. After the shift, trainees were asked to fill out an online anonymous form and submit their written comments. The present letter is the result of this brief survey. All of the trainees answered the shift question. Less than 42 % answered they volunteered for the shift, as well as, only 16.7 % would be volunteer if be asked again.

Half of the trainees reported their distress increased after the shift. They declared two main sources of concern, the first about the possibility of the disease transmission, such as inadequate protection, the impossibility of long-term quarantine after the shift, the inadequate education about wearing and taking off the personal protective equipment, inadequate sterilization of the diagnostic equipment like pulse-oximeters and worry about future outbreaks. The next distressing mentioned issue was the quality of service which was provided for patients by them, such as sense of inexperience and inadequate presence and guidance of senior specialists. Trainees who experienced less anxiety also emphasized on appropriate protective equipment and exposure as a way to reduce stress.

Despite the perception of inadequate education before the shift in 83.3 % of the trainees, 58.3 % of them stated, their knowledge and experience to treat patients with COVID-19 has increased after the shift, and 43.6 % of them stated that they have gained new experience of the mental state of patients and the medical staff. As a matter of fact, only 16.7 % of them showed their interest to visit the COVID-19 patients again for medical management, whereas more than 83 % of them expressed their readiness to handle psychiatric problems of these patients. In addition, more than 90 % of the trainees expressed that they could play an effective role in raising public awareness to strengthen their coping mechanisms, and 75 % stated they are willing to provide online psychiatric services to patients and staff. Moreover, none of them believed that psychiatrists should provide face-to-face services for the patients and medical staff.

Finally, they suggested acting more prominent role in supporting the families of deceased patients’ medical staff, creating the possibility of online visits and paying special attention to certain groups such as substance users by psychiatric trainees.

Based on this experience, we conclude that although all medical personnel should be sufficiently prepared for critical conditions, it seems better that mental health personnel be involved in more specialized tasks and based on generally accepted guidelines (Li et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors don’t declare any conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

We must appreciate involved psychiatric trainees of Iran University of Medical Sciences for their effective collaboration to manage patients amid the outbreak as well as participation in the survey.
References

Ashrafi-Rizi, H., Kazempour, Z., 2020. Information typology in coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis; a commentary. Arch. Acad. Emerg. Med. 8, e19.

Li, W., Yang, Y., Liu, Z.-H., Zhao, Y.-J., Zhang, Q., Zhang, L., Cheung, T., Xiang, Y.-T., 2020. Progression of mental health services during the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Int. J. Biol. Sci. 16, 1732–1738.

Shalbafan, M., Khademoreza, N., 2020. What we can learn from COVID-19 outbreak in Iran about the importance of alcohol use education. Am. J. Drug Alcohol Abuse. https://doi.org/10.1080/00952990.2020.1753759.

World Health Organization, 2020. Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During the COVID-19 Outbreak, 18 March 2020. World Health Organization.

Zandifar, A., Badrfan, R., 2020. Iranian mental health during the COVID-19 epidemic. Asian J. Psychiatry 51, 101990.

Behnam Shariati, Mehrdad Eftekhar Ardebili, Mohammadreza Shalbafan*

Mental Health Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences,
Tehran, Iran

E-mail address: Shalbafan_mr@iums.ac.ir (M. Shalbafan).

* Corresponding author at: Mental Health Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Shahid Mansouri St., Niyayesh St., Satarkhan, Tehran, Iran.