

Diagnostic Key for Clinical Decisions during the Pandemic Scenario

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Editorial

Clinical health professionals faced one of the most formidable challenges of their working lives in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For some clinicians, this period was a time to re-think and reduce their clinical practice; for others, a time to face an invisible enemy and improve patients' quality of life. Apart from emergency treatments during a pandemic period, preventive interventions evoke a feeling of uncertainty in both patients and professionals in deciding when it is best to start a procedure. Consequently, many clinicians found themselves in an ambiguous situation: follow-up on a patient with a treatable disease and wait for the mitigation of the COVID-19 scenario or prevent the aggravation of some non-COVID-19-related disorder by providing the necessary treatment.

Six months after the onset of the pandemic, it is time to reorganize clinical offices to confront other COVID-19-provoked changes in clinical practice. For many clinicians, the extra time they had on their hands as a result of the shutdown in professional activities was seen as an opportunity to enhance knowledge. As never before, the health sciences offered free high-quality information to help clinical professionals take advantage of this leisure time. Several scientific journals, publishing companies, data base platforms and virtual meetings collaborated to make scientific data available to physicians, dentists and other health specialists. Decisions in clinical offices will be influenced by the knowledge acquired by these professionals and could enhance clinical decision-making.

Widespread information for health professionals will be a very powerful weapon in the struggle to improve patients' quality of life. It has been reported that this pandemic infection has greatly increased the presentation of myocardial infarction and the need for care [1]. Patients' fear and confusion in seeking non-Covid-19-related medical appointments are integral parts of the emerging public health crisis. The impact on clinical offices is incalculable, as many specialties present a contamination risk for both patient and professional. Treatments have been cancelled on a large scale and a return to normalizing clinical appointments is a long way off. This scenario must be carefully understood by all specialties in the medical community so that task forces are set up to inform patients and clini-

cians about where the risks could be more dangerous than the benefits of treating or not treating.

A deeper knowledge of diagnostic tools will be essential to prevent aggravations of the disorders imposed by the pandemic, and to apply them in varying ways. As recognized throughout the world, the first contact between clinician and patient could benefit from a virtual appointment, especially in cases of preventive follow-up. However, the absence of a physical examination could limit the full understanding of health conditions. During a virtual examination, clinicians must be aware of every sign and symptom reported by the patient in order to recognize those who must seek a physical appointment and complimentary exams if their condition is to be prevented from worsening. Nowadays, the role of diagnostic tool comprehension is to fill the gap in the decision to start an unavoidable physical examination or treatment. There are many diagnostic tools available which have been enhanced by modern technology. Biological marker [2] and innovative imaging modalities [3] are some examples which help to improve the diagnosis of a disorder and its stages of development. The search for disorder signals of stages, and a deep understanding of each phase of a disease is another way to benefit patients in making the decision to start treatment.

How health specialties will return to normality is still uncertain. Although many mathematical models have tried to predict world scenarios for the health of populations, it is only the commitment to understand an individual patient's condition, within a safe decision, that would be beneficial to all patients.

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