

The Overwhelming Aftermath of COVID-19

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It gives me immense pleasure to write a guest editorial for the upcoming issue of the Acta Scientific Otolaryngology journal.

The world is witnessing a global pandemic caused by the Coronavirus. The medical community found itself struggling to figure out effective means to control its spread and prevent complications, as it continues to elude an effective standard treatment strategy because of its multi-pronged attack.

Typically, SARS-CoV-2 manifested as a form of acute respiratory distress syndrome, that, where uncontrolled, could lead to severe immunosuppression brought about by decreased CD-4+T and CD-8+T cells, predisposing the patients to various opportunistic fungal infections, especially mucormycosis.

Mucormycosis has always been prevalent, albeit in a quiescent phase around us. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, an ensuing state of immunosuppression accentuated the potential of mucormycosis, forming a more complex and lethal symbiotic relationship.

The rise of mucormycosis has been attributed to the trifecta of hyperglycemia, oxygen therapy, and prolonged misuse of corticosteroids.

But, inexplicably, it also affected young males with no prior history of any underlying disease or immunocompromised state, and new-onset hyperglycemia was one of the highlighted observations in this group.

The alarming rise in cases of mucormycosis in India, especially in the second wave of COVID-19, necessitated the requirement of protocols to tackle the disease.

Being highly aggressive and contagious, with a grave prognosis, cases of mucormycosis required a challenging multidisciplinary approach.

Mucormycosis presented with a wide clinical spectrum ranging from sinonasal, rhino-maxillary, rhino-orbital, or rhino-orbito-cerebral involvement that required prompt diagnosis based on clinical suspicion, rapid microbiological confirmation, and radiologic assessment for extent of its spread, followed by immediate surgical debridement, which remained the cornerstone of the treatment in the hope of eradicating the infection. The surgical debridement required simultaneous cover with Amphotericin B, followed by Posaconazole, usually for a prolonged period over several weeks.

The ease of availability and/or affordability of these drugs was also a hard-hitting challenge and contributed to poorer outcomes.

Even then, the battle against mucormycosis was only half won, as the psychological impacts still persisted affecting the quality of life of the patients as well as their caregivers.

The importance of psychological rehabilitation has not been sufficiently addressed and needs to be borne in mind.

Also not well appreciated is the fact that as Covid cases began to rise and overwhelm health care resources, the physical and mental concerns of healthcare workers went unnoticed and largely ignored.

This was especially the case of ENT clinicians who were constantly battling life threatening aerosol exposure from potential carriers and patients.

Hence formulation of regulations and protocols for conducting routine clinical practices by ENT specialists became essential to ensure their uninterrupted service, while safeguarding their health as well.

Most institutions have eventually put their SOPs in place and are prepared to work seamlessly in the prevailing scenario of endemicity of the pandemic.

The other factors that have continued to aid us through the pandemic were the rapid exchange of research data and clinical experience shared by medical and surgical practitioners across the globe.

It is hoped that the world, with the support of its healthcare elements, is now rebooted to a more effective state for prevention of uncontrolled spread or complications from this notorious disease that may not yet be on its way out.

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