

Role of Clinical Rehabilitation in Recuperating from the COVID-19 Illness

Sir,

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has outstretched the health sector owing to the rising number of incident cases and the continuous care required for the management and rehabilitation of the patients.^[1] As a matter of fact, a cumulative total of 5,304,772 cases and 3,42,029 deaths have been attributed to the infection to date.^[2] Even though, the case fatality rate of the novel infection is high and stands at 6.4%, on a positive note, in excess of 90% of the infected cases can survive through the infection because of the prompt management and continuous rehabilitation.^[1,2]

It would not be wrong to admit that the emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak in all the nations has compelled the public health authorities to transform the health-care delivery to meet the rising health care demands of the affected individuals. On the clinical front, the causative virus predominantly affects the respiratory system, and in case the patient develops the severe form of acute respiratory distress syndrome due to pneumonia, the patient develops hypoxic respiratory insufficiency and requires artificial ventilatory support.^[3] The component of respiratory rehabilitation ensures that the airways are clean, and the lung function is maintained through artificial ventilation.^[3] It is extremely important to improve the rehabilitation services in the postacute phase of the illness to help the patient to completely recover from the illness. Moreover, due to the involvement of the central nervous system, patients have manifested with altered taste or smell sensation, and even neuropsychological manifestations.^[4] The rehabilitation component encompasses care for respiratory consequences (increasing the lung capacity), care for bed sores developed due to prolonged immobility, peripheral muscle weaknesses, limitations in joint mobility, etc.^[3,4] On considering these consequences of the infection, it is needless to say that rehabilitation is an integral and indispensable aspect of the medical management of the novel viral infection. It is vital to understand that the provision of rehabilitative support to the infected patients essentially requires a multidisciplinary approach and has to be tailor-made based on the presence of other predisposing factors (such as the elderly, underlying disease, or development of complications, etc.).^[3-5]

The ideal approach will be to perform a thorough assessment of the case and formulate a tailor-made and a progressive management plan keeping in mind the functioning and the prevailing disability and expediting the return of the persons to the activities in the society through improvement in their quality of life. This will obviously require support from a team of professionals, including experts from physiotherapy,

occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, neurologist, psychological counselor, etc.^[3-6] The rehabilitation services help the patient recuperate from the infection and return to a preinfection functional status, which is very much essential in ensuring the complete recovery.^[1]

In addition, rehabilitative care also involves assistance for swallowing difficulties resulting because of the prolonged intubation and is important from the perspective of social integration.^[3,4] Further, the need of a speech therapist or neuropsychological assistance can also be not ruled out as the survivors of the disease will have multiple psychological concerns, including posttraumatic stress disorder.^[4] In-fact, rehabilitation plays a crucial role in the complete recovery of the diagnosed cases even after their discharge from the hospitals, and it has to be continued through community-based rehabilitation.^[3-5]

In conclusion, rehabilitation of the COVID-19 cases is a critical component in the management and cure of the illness. However, considering the urgent need of rehabilitation specialists, it is essential to maintain their adequate numbers in the health facilities and support them with better quality personal protective equipment and psychosocial support to discharge their roles effectively.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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