

The COVID-19 outbreak in Milan: our experience so far.

In the Italian region where I work, Lombardy, we have seen a continuous and rapid increase in Covid-19 cases and related deaths in adults, while in the pediatric population the problem fortunately seems to have been kept under control. Furthermore, to date, in our unit no dialysed or transplanted child has tested positive.

Following is what we have learned so far from this epochal medical crisis:

1. Approximately 9% of those infected are healthcare workers: doctors, nurses, porters, ambulance workers. It is imperative that both hospital staff and those working throughout the territory use all the personal protective equipment available at all times. If our doctors and nurses fall ill, who will be there to dialyse our children? Staff meetings need to be short in duration and kept to a bare minimum. During meetings, masks should be worn, safety distances respected, and windows kept open.
2. In light of this, it is necessary to ask the health authorities to test not only symptomatic people, but also all those who have had contact with an infected person, but who are asymptomatic. A recently published article in Science (attached) demonstrates how healthy carriers can contribute to actively spreading the disease. This is true for healthcare staff as they run a high risk of becoming infected and therefore of infecting patients and members of their own families.
3. The behaviour of each individual is important. Whoever can stay at home should stay at home and avoid any non-essential reason for social contact. The elderly and our patients need to be isolated as best possible and a high level of alert must be maintained. This means that every patient accessing the hospital must undergo a process of triage in order for us to differentiate between infected and non-infected patients.

In summary, agree on a plan of action with your hospital administration and, where possible, with your Ministry of Health. Demand that all cases of suspected infection or contact be tested, and, if possible, also healthcare staff. The extremely high number of infected healthcare workers represents a shocking statistic.

Keep fighting and stay safe

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