



Beware of COVID-19 involving the liver and digestive system

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is spreading globally at a very rapid pace. Recently there is an exponential increase in the number of cases suffering from COVID in Pakistan. Though a majority of patients needing hospitalization present with fever, cough, and shortness of breath, the disease may present with digestive symptoms like nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal discomfort. There is evidence that in addition to droplet transmission, the fecal-oral transmission also exists. These patients may have disturbed liver function tests, low albumin levels, and prolonged prothrombin time. Liver injury is more common in more severe cases.

The patients with chronic liver disease are immunocompromised, so are the patients on immunosuppressive drugs like autoimmune liver disease, liver transplant recipients and patients on biologics for inflammatory bowel disease. Reducing or stopping the immunosuppression may end up with a flare of the disease or graft rejection. These patients should observe precautions in a very strict manner. Patients with fatty liver disease with diabetes and hypertension are also at a greater risk of severe symptoms if affected with COVID-19. Please read the 'PSSLD Guidance for chronic liver disease patients'.

To minimize exposure to the virus in clinics, the doctor should wear a mask and gloves. Screen the patients for COVID symptoms before they enter the clinic. Adopt the 'one patient one attendant' policy. Avoid unnecessary appointments and prefer video clinics without direct contact with the patient.

Endoscopic procedures may expose the staff of the endoscopy suite to the droplets emerging out from coughing, gagging and passing flatus. The staff of the endoscopy suite should observe due precautions. They should wear proper personal protection equipment (PPE). Elective procedures should be postponed and emergency procedures like gastrointestinal bleeding use gloves masks, goggles, and gowns. The staff should be trained on how to remove PPE without exposing oneself. Hand hygiene is very important, washing hands for 20 seconds before and after the procedure.

Though COVID-19 runs a mild course in many, the patients with liver disease and co-morbid are more likely to have a prolonged and serious illness. So take care of yourself and your loved-ones