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Assessing the Risk of People with Epilepsy During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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In early 2020, Italy is facing an unprecedented health emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Medical care for chronic neurological diseases such as epilepsy has been seriously neglected that in this national survey, our goal is to understand the impact of blocking COVID-19 on the care of patients with epilepsy (PwE) and to determine PwE risk factors for seizure deterioration to guide telemedicine efforts.

Italy is facing an unprecedented health emergency represented by the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV2 virus. The quarantine, travel ban and lockdown measures implemented by the government across the country have had initial effects to limit the spread of virus infections. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to strict quarantine measures across the Italian peninsula. Almost inevitably, isolation is accompanied by the onset or worsening of sleep, mood, and anxiety disorders. It is also associated with an increased risk of insufficient medical care for chronic diseases including epilepsy. Blocking the social and behavioral consequences of COVID-19 will increase the frequency of seizures in patients with epilepsy (PwE). In addition, infection with the COVID19 virus itself can cause fever, which lowers the seizure threshold. The shutdown of the industry made it difficult to supply anti-epileptic drugs (ASM), and the reduction in care services limited to emergencies made it difficult for PwE to receive regular follow-ups and maintain contact with the treating physician. In order to solve these difficulties, Italian neurologists are using various communication strategies (such as email, telephone, email, Internet teleconference, etc.) to keep in touch with patients, while continuing to respond to the growing demand for medical assistance.

COVID-19 pandemic has recently caused an unprecedented global dilemma. With the increase in cases, the pressure of health services and the severe disruption of people's daily lives will have a negative impact on patients with chronic diseases, including epilepsy. Stressors related to healthcare, finances, mental health, interpersonal relationships, education, physical activity, and increasing isolation may increase seizures and affect self-management of epilepsy.

40% of respondents reported changes in their health during the pandemic (n=185). Respondents listed epileptic seizures (19%, n=88), mental health difficulties (34%, n=161) and sleep disorders (26%, n=121) as the main reasons. 13% of people find it difficult to take their medicines on time. Our goal is to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of patients with epilepsy, focusing on the risk of seizures, related comorbidities, and increased mortality. We designed two online surveys, one directly targeted at epilepsy patients, and the other was reported by nurses on behalf of epilepsy patients. Compared with healthy people, in the context of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, people with comorbidities are more vulnerable, including those with epilepsy. Except for consensus recommendations from epilepsy experts in many countries, the status of epilepsy management during the pandemic is rarely reported.

The results of these investigations indicate that the health status of patients with epilepsy is changing and that they are unable to obtain adequate services. In addition, there appears to be a history of risk communication errors in the months leading up to the pandemic. As the UK is witnessing the second wave of COVID-19, those involved in providing healthcare must ensure that patients with chronic diseases such as epilepsy receive the best care to ensure preventable morbidity and mortality are prevented during and after the pandemic. According to the report of the respondent, the proportion of patients who consulted by telephone or online (88.4%) and patients who had regular case reviews (93.9%) were higher in high-risk areas. Patients in high-risk areas are more likely to experience increased seizures (17.7%), increased psychological disorders (30.2%), and decreased availability of antiepileptic drugs (ASM) (77.2%). Patients with epilepsy urgently need a MAPE supply (74.6%), a medical consultation (69.2%) and psychological assistance (29.2%).

This study shows the most common dilemmas faced by epilepsy patients in the political environment during the COVID19 epidemic in China. The opinions of Chinese epilepsy experts may provide references for epilepsy care in other countries. It is necessary to deepen the study of the physical and mental health of patients with epilepsy in this public health crisis.

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