

EDITORIAL

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EVOLVING PROBLEMS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Corona viruses are large viruses that affect animals and in rare occasions may become zoonotic. The transmission is by droplets or aerosols. Coughing, sneezing and handshake are dangerous modes of transmission. Fever, runny nose, sore throat, headache and loss of sense of smell are important symptomatology. Social or physical distancing, nose masking and hand washing are preventive measures that have been accepted globally.

The treatment protocol in some centres consisted of testing, isolation, hospitalization and the administration of hydroxychloroquine, chloroquine, azithromycin, zinc, oxygen, methylprednisolone, doxycycline and ICU treatment in appropriate combinations. Hydroxychloroquine was initially accepted by the WHO which later withdrew it. So the world is still looking for an effective and affordable cure. Convalescent plasma is used for treatment in a few centres.

Fatalities have occurred globally with the USA, Brazil, Mexico, Britain, Italy and Spain losing a lot of their citizens. In Africa significant losses have occurred in S. Africa and N. Africa. The fatality rate for most of the rest of the African countries has been much lower but we do not know all the reasons.

The health delivery systems have been over-stretched in some countries. There have been new requirements as PPEs have to be obtained for all frontline workers at a tremendous cost to the nations. Despite the all hands-on-deck approach, the following are the figures obtained four months after recording the first positive COVID-19 case in Ghana: 39,075 total positive cases, 3,313 active cases, 574 new cases, 199 deaths, 35,563 recoveries¹. The Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana (NMIMR), and the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research, KNUST, (KCCR) have led the country in testing for the virus. The Ga East Municipal Hosp, Univ of Ghana Medical Centre, Ridge Hosp, Korle Bu Teaching Hosp, Univ. of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Komfo Anokye Teaching Hosp, Tamale Teaching Hosp, Pentecost Convention Centre, Nyaho Hosp, and the 37 Military Hosp are notable institutions that have treated some of the patients successfully. The Cape Coast Teaching Hosp, Effia- Nkwanta Hosp and the other regional hospitals have been converted to treat the COVID-19 patients.

Since 6th May, the UNESCO estimated that 177 nations had closed down schools affecting 1.2 billion learners to slow down the spread and mitigate the effect on health systems². In Ghana 9.2 million pupils and 0.5 million students in tertiary institutions have been affected. The financial and psychological cost of online studying were high for the learners/students as well as the teachers.

About 77.7% of households in GH experienced a decrease in income since 16th March 2020 since the COVID-19 struck in Ghana. GH Statistical service (3). It is an emerging disease. The WHO and other world bodies tasked to solve the pandemic have also been under severe strain because the picture of the pandemic changes rapidly from time to time. The protocol for management has been challenged by political leaders many a time and nations have varied greatly with their approach, therefore resulting in varied results in terms of morbidity and mortality. The USA alone has lost about 170,000 patients so far and the need for a cure and vaccine has become paramount.

There is an urgent need to develop a vaccine and many nations have shown a lot of interest. China, USA, Germany, Britain, France and Russia are at the forefront. It would be prudent to have a coordinating body for all the endeavours but now the USA has withdrawn its membership from the WHO.

If we follow the science and data, we could use the preventive measures to reduce the effects of COVID-19. The cure or vaccine will take more time to come. The economy has to be re- built after the serious down-turn due to the COVID-19. We need to document the events completely and honestly for posterity.

References

1. www.ghanahealthservice.org. (Accessed on 5th August 2020).
2. www.unicef.org. (Accessed on 5th August 2020)
3. <https://bit.ly/3hQJwq9> (Accessed on 15th Aug. 2020).

Prof JD Seffah

Obstetrician Gynaecologist

Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, School of Medicine and Dentistry University of Ghana Accra, Ghana