

We have to write and share valid and reliable information on COVID-19

Su May Liew, Chief Editor, Malaysian Family Physician

Ee Ming Khoo, Department of Primary Care Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya

Wee Kooi Cheah, Hospital Taiping, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

Kalaiarasu Peariasamy, Hospital Sungai Buloh, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

Pik Pin Goh, Institute for Clinical Research, National Institutes of Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

Hishamshah M Ibrahim, Deputy Director General of Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

The world has been grappling with the outbreak of COVID-19 for the past few months. The coronavirus, which was first reported in Wuhan, China has now spread to 82 countries and infected more than 95000 individuals.¹ As of March 5, 2020, there have been 55 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Malaysia.¹

This epidemic has required a strong collaborative response from those working in primary care, emergency services, infectious disease, public health, internal medicine and pediatrics. Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health were constantly updated with new case definitions changing by the day with reports of outbreaks in different countries.¹ There was a need for rapid sharing of information throughout the health care system that was unprecedented. An official website to disseminate guidelines was set up quickly by the Ministry of Health.¹ Yet, despite all these efforts, viral sharing of misinformation occurred even more rapidly through social media and group text messaging.² An infected patient that was admitted in a private hospital also highlighted existing gaps in private-public dissemination that was subsequently addressed.³

In the wake of this pandemic, the health care practitioners and authorities have come to realize the need for valid and reliable information. We are not known to be a nation of readers. The practice of evidence based medicine is still limited.⁴ Yet, we are all now avidly reading the latest papers regarding the outbreak. Such reports and studies are shared widely on group text messages and read even by the public.

We, the COVID 19 Malaysian writing group, believe that all the cases and responses to the infection in Malaysia should be reported, studied and published in order to improve our knowledge and response to such infections. It is only by transparent sharing and dissemination, that proper strategies can be developed and tested, and policy installed. Reporting would also improve public awareness and dispel myths. Let us continue to work together to overcome this pandemic.

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