

COVID-19, family medicine, and primary care centers

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Dear Editor,

We read the article “We have to write and share valid and reliable information on COVID-19” with great interest.¹ We would like to share some ideas from our country, Thailand, where the disease emerged relatively early.² We agree that the reliability of data is of the utmost importance, and local data is oftentimes not updated. The officially reported number of COVID-19 patients in might be an underestimation. In fact, some of those with the disease are asymptomatic, meaning the virus may be imported from countries with unknown risk levels.³

Family physicians play a significant role during this pandemic, as they are often where patients initially go to address medical problems. Therefore, family physicians should have up-to-date COVID-19 information in order to properly manage cases. Of course, they should also know how to protect themselves by following universal precautions. The question of whether patients should visit their local family physician to test for COVID-19 is an interesting one. Fear of disease is common in Thailand and people usually visit big hospitals for consultations specialists. However, the infection-control guidelines for COVID-19 in Thailand assert that those who suspect they have the disease should go to the primary care clinics. Only after testing positive are patients directed to the local hospital; referral to tertiary care centers is done in severe cases. Nevertheless, Thai citizens are free to choose between the free government healthcare system and paid private medical services. The promotion of trust in the primary care system and family physicians is crucial during this crisis.

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