Psychological Support for Outpatients During COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the prevalence of psychological distress and the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions among COVID-19 outpatients in Kedah Medical Centre (KMC). The sample of the study was 284 outpatients.
The results showed that 95% of the patients had psychological distress. The qualitative analysis revealed that the patients found the informational support, negative emotional support, social support very helpful to cope with their grievances.
Psychosocial interventions are crucial in caring for COVID-19 patients. Healthcare providers can aid in grief and promote well-being by offering diverse, accessible support options.

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INTRODUCTION

- The Covid-19 outbreak was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020. With the rapid increase in the number of cases involving countries from both developing and developed ones, it was then later declared and announced as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.
- During the pandemic Covid-19, psychological interventions for the bereaved were needed for outpatients seeking medical treatment at KMC. It was observed that outpatients who had their Covid-19 test done that resulted in a positive interpretation had experienced much higher grief levels. Patients were anxious and had that uncertain feeling about their conditions and what will happen as well as the fear of death.
- The Grief and Bereavement team at KMC provides psychological support to all outpatients that were confirmed positive for Covid-19 after being tested. Psychological support was provided via phone calls and face-to-face. Types of psychological support provided on informational support, practical support, social support and negative emotional support were given prior their transferred to the government hospital, quarantine centre or self-quarantined at home.
- The aims of the study were:-
  1. To determine the prevalence of psychological distress among recently diagnosed Covid 19 patients in Kedah Medical Centre.
  2. To assess whether our psychosocial interventions benefitted the group of recently diagnosed Covid 19 patients.
  3. To explore any common themes which may arise during our qualitative interviews. This may help shape and improve our future interventions.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

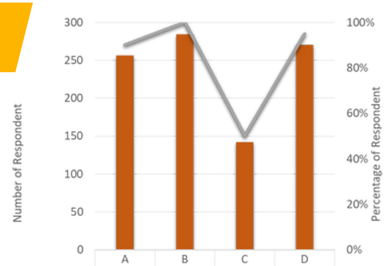
- This is a mixed-method study of quantitative and qualitative design. The study population of the study consisted of outpatients who were RTK Ag positive in KMC between February 2021 to March 2022. Patient was classified under Category 1 and 2. The sample of the study was 284 outpatients.
- Exclusion criteria were patients Covid 19 under categories 3 and 4 because they are very ill and have been isolated in a room with restricted access.
- Those selected patients were given (a)Distress thermometer.(b) Basic demographic questionnaires and subsequently all patients were interviewed individually to determine any common themes which may arise.
- Psychosocial support were provided to each of them which included (a) informational support (b) Practical support (c) Emotional support.
- A follow up calls were made to all participants 1 month after the initial intervention to determine the usefulness of our psychological interventions. Each of them were e asked 4 questions as follow:-
  - A.Did you receive any emotional support or psychological support?
  - B.Did you understand the explanation given by Medical Officer/Nurses/Infection Control Nurse?
  - C.Were you satisfied with the services provide?
  - D.Do you have any comments or suggestion for the services were provided to you?

RESULTS

- The sample of the study was 284 composing 55% (n=157) male patients and 45% (n=127) female patients. Aged between 18 to 74 years.
- 70% (n=200) Covid 19 outpatient under Category 1 was in self-home quarantine, 20% (n=56) Covid 19 outpatient under Category 1 and 2 were sent to quarantine center and the other 10% (n=28) Covid-19 outpatient Category 2 was sent to the government hospital for admission.
- 270 out of 284 of Covid 19 outpatients scored ≥ 5 on Distress Thermometer after being confirmed positive Covid 19 giving a prevalence psychological distress of 95%. They worry about their own self and family member health, who will care of the family member, especially their children, isolation period and isolation place, social isolation due to being unfairly treated by friends, other relatives and neighbours including fear of death.
- Following the result of a follow-up call to the patient after a month he or she had been diagnosed as a positive Covid-19.
- 90% (n=256) out of 284 of Covid 19 outpatients informed that psychological support especially informational support that has been shared verbally and a pamphlet that has been shared via WhatsApp is very helpful in providing information such as health education on Covid 19, management of close contact, self-monitoring and how and where to contact during an emergency.
- 100% of outpatients were informed that a clear explanation was given by Medical Officer and Infection Control nurse related what is the next action to be carried out after being confirmed as positive Covid 19.
- However, 50% (n=142) out of 284 of Covid 19 patients informed that facilities such as placing them in tents without any bed facilities, hot without fans or air conditioning caused the patient was not comfortable and difficult to assess the restroom as mobile toilets located at the back of the hospital. 95% (n=270) out of 284 of Covid 19 patients suggested continuing these services and commented to improve the facilities.
- Qualitative analyses revealed a few common themes:-
- Psychological support on informational support is a process of sharing information for better decision-making or for better-coping mechanisms. Sharing information on health education on Covid 19, management of close contact, self-monitoring and etc. based on patient enquiries. All this information was shared verbally and sending the pamphlet via WhatsApp is very helpful for patients in gaining a better awareness of managing the Covid 19 for themselves and their family me.
- Negative emotional support that was provided during expressing their negative emotion after being confirmed Covid 19 by Medical Officers and nurses was very satisfying and able to reduce their anxiety level. Negative emotions expressed the feeling of being sad because need to be separated from family members, anxiety due to no physical contact with family members and worries about the family member being infected by the patient and fear of dying alone. Allow the bereaved patient to talk and express their grief in whatever way they need, and emotional support is given to reduce their stress by listening and counselling the patient.
- Social Support was perceived as not easily accessible, especially to those who were self-quarantined at home. Most of them were alone in their room worried will infect the family members. Contact family members via phone to communicate. The patient who was quarantined at the quarantine centre was able to interact with other infected patients, so the feeling of loneliness is less but missed their family members due to the separation.

GRAPHS AND TABLES

FEEDBACK ON FOLLOW-UP CALL TO OUTPATIENT AFTER A MONTH BEEN DIAGNOSED AS A POSITIVE COVID 19



	A	B	C	D
Number of Respondent	256	284	142	270
Percentage of respondent	90%	100%	50%	95%

DISCUSSION

Informational support, negative emotional support and social support were the three main themes identified during interview sessions. Most of the patients go through initial emotional reaction of shock, fear and panic after receiving the positive result of Covid 19. After gaining the psychology interventions and counselling from the healthcare providers, their stress level reduced and able to cope with their condition.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the findings highlight the significance of implementing and enhancing psychological support programs tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of outpatient individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing accessible, personalized and diverse support options, healthcare providers and organizations can effectively assist individuals in their grief journey and promote their overall well-being in these challenging times.

Recommendations were brought up for the hospital in improving the experience of bereaved patients during Covid-19, following this and the future pandemic, Patient safety and quality care were both not being comprised when bereaved patients were emotionally cared for.

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