A study of the impact of COVID pandemic on utilization patterns of the mental health services of a tertiary care standalone psychiatry hospital

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Abstract

The COVID pandemic due to perceived likelihood of infection, perceived coping efficacy, financial loss, media exposure to COVID-19 outbreak, and quarantine measures is extracting mental health toll. The response to the pandemic with various countries implementing lock- downs, loss of access to mental health support, alongside loss of positive activities compounds the problem. Relapses are likely due to jeopardy in both the availability of regular medication and medication compliance. Non-availability of substance of dependence or medicines can precipitate severe withdrawal symptoms and result in inadequate accessibility to dwindling emergency services. Recent surveys show a 20% increase in mental illnesses since the corona- virus outbreak. To deal with the challenge of cross-infection from the onsite delivery of healthcare, telehealth and other remote forms of behavioral health delivery need to be enhanced. This a naturalistic, observational study analyses data from COVID pandemic collected on disease pattern, presentation of illnesses and utilization of mental health services. The total number of clinic visits showed a decrease by 54% with 33% fall in new cases during the same period. Admissions remained static, though 18% were directly related to COVID factors. Regarding the utilization of online services, the data showed 320% increase in number of downloads of the App with video consults rising by a phenomenal 1720%. The outpatient visits (total and new) showed a reduction in comparison to last year evidently as a result of travel restrictions imposed by the lockdown. There was a substantial increase in utilization of telepsychiatry resources that probably compensated for the service shortfall. The inpatient admissions remained static though the COVID related cases contributed to 18.2% of total cases. The study underlines how telepsychiatry services can effectively replenish face to face consultations in the face of the pandemic and quarantine.

Biography:

Asif Iqbal Ahmed is a Gold Medalist, Post Graduate in Psychiatry (1995) from prestigious Armed Forces Medical College, Pune. He retired as Surgeon Captain from the Army Medical Corps (Colonel) where he rendered yeoman service for 25 years in mental healthcare. During his illustrious career he received Chief of Naval Staff Commendation and citations for devotion to duty while catering to the mental health needs of the community. After retiring as Senior Adviser (Psychiatry) from Armed Forces in 2013, being a keen Academician and MCI recognized Professor has been teaching MBBS students and Residents in Psychiatry while serving as Chief Consultant at a Psychiatry Hospital providing comprehensive inpatient, outpatient and community care. He has been awarded European Medical Association award for Best Medical Practices in Mental Healthcare. His mission is to reduce stigma towards psychiatry patients by creating awareness and make care accessible. His areas of interest are geriatrics and dual diagnoses.

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