

Is the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic an Indication to Temporarily Modify Dermatological Management Plans?

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INTRODUCTION

While the world lives under the shadow of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, dermatologists wonder if the current situation calls for a temporary change in the management of skin conditions.

Immunosuppressive drugs are used ubiquitously in the modern treatment of inflammatory and autoimmune skin diseases like psoriasis, bullous diseases, connective tissue diseases, and many others. Treatment of these conditions is based on the suppression of the patient's immune system using steroids, steroid-sparing drugs, and biological agents.¹

While the effects of the novel coronavirus on the body and its immune system are still being studied, there is overwhelming evidence that the virus could directly or indirectly affect the immune system. In one study, lymphocytopenia was reported in 83.2% of the admitted patients and might be associated with a worse prognosis.² In another study, a steady decline in the lymphocyte counts was recorded in a group of patients who did not survive the infection.³

While the coexisting comorbid medical conditions (such as diabetes or heart disease) are considered as independent predictors of an adverse outcome of the novel coronavirus infection,⁴ it could be assumed that the chronic inflammatory and autoimmune skin diseases like psoriasis by themselves might imply an additional risk factor of developing more serious symptoms of the novel virus due to their chronicity and effects on the immune system.⁵

The use of immunosuppressive to treat these conditions can amplify this effect, and it might leave the patient vulnerable to more serious complications should an infection with the novel coronavirus be established. Hence, it may be wise to restrict temporarily the use of immunosuppressive agents including systemic steroids, steroid-sparing agents, and biologics in dermatology daily practice until more evidence is available about their safety in the current pandemic.⁶ As a related point, the International Psoriasis Council declared an urgent statement on March 11, 2020 that the physician should be alert to the potentially harmful effects of COVID-19 infection on patients with psoriasis and to immediately discontinue or postpone immuno-

suppressant medications for psoriasis patients diagnosed with COVID-19 disease.⁷

CONCLUSION

As the declaration of the novel coronavirus as a pandemic by the WHO is a trending topic nowadays, dermatologists around the world view with concern the impact of this pandemic on their daily practice.

While there is no overwhelming evidence for this recommendation, as the novel coronavirus seems to specifically target the immunity, and as the people with weak immunity are vulnerable to get more fatal outcomes, it is highly recommended to temporarily avoid the unnecessary use of immunosuppressive agents and use more conservative alternatives, unless they are used as a life-saving measure.

DISCLOSURE

The author has no relevant conflicts of interest.

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