

health policies counteracting the outbreak have been implemented. Surprisingly, some physicians have a lower knowledge score than non-physicians. These data indicate the necessity to improve education about the new disease among medical personnel. Medical personnel also educate the local population regarding disease and precautions, and if medical personnel are not knowledgeable, disease control may not succeed.

Acknowledgments. None.

Financial support. No financial support was provided relevant to this article.

Conflicts of interest. All authors report no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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Corticosteroid use for 2019-nCoV infection: A double-edged sword

Sundus Nasim MBBS¹, Sohail Kumar MBBS¹ , Dua Azim MBBS¹, Zehra Ashraf MPhil² and Qiraat Azeem MBBS¹

¹MBBS, Dow Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan and ²Faculty of Pharmacy, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, Pakistan

To the Editor—A newly emergent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), first recognized in the city of Wuhan, China, in early December 2019, is a respiratory tract infection. On March 11, 2020, with >118,000 cases reported in 114 countries and nearly 4,291 deaths worldwide, this virus was labeled a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).¹ Responding to the uncertain clinical progression of COVID-19 and the absence of any particular therapy with established efficacy, the medical and scientific communities are working to develop various therapies to achieve an effective cure for the COVID-19. Some physicians have suggested corticosteroids to treat COVID-19 as in previous outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

Although corticosteroid use has been reported in hospitalized patients with severe disease, contradictory evidence from the WHO regarding corticosteroid use in some viral illnesses suggests that this evidence is not definitive. In severe cases of COVID-19, complications (eg, pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, cardiomyopathy, arrhythmia, acute kidney failure, sepsis, and septic shock) can occur along with complications associated with prolonged hospitalization (eg, secondary bacterial infections). In severely ill patients with these complications, corticosteroids have been used widely.^{2–4} During a retrospective review in Wuhan Union Hospital,⁵ the efficacy of the early use of short-term corticosteroids was investigated and compared with a control group using the clinical record and chest computed tomography (CT) scans. Among these groups, one group was intravenously administered methylprednisolone at a dose of 1–2 mg/kg/d for 5–7 days. The results included the rapid return of body temperature to a normal and improvement in peripheral capillary oxygen saturation (SpO₂). Chest CTs showed improved absorption focus with methylprednisolone administration. Parallel to these reported observations, another Chinese study showed similar outcomes with early use of high-dose corticosteroids along with quinolone

in patients with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV).⁶

Contrary to the aforementioned results, the current interim guidance from WHO on clinical management of severe acute respiratory infection when COVID-19 is suspected (released January 28, 2020),⁷ advises against the utilization of corticosteroids during this disease unless it is indicated for a comorbid clinical condition. The wide use of this drug in the management of SARS-CoV and the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) worsened the immune response and caused diffuse alveolar damage, even though it did suppress lung inflammation to some extent.^{8,9} In a review of observational studies on SARS patients with progressively worsening pulmonary conditions or abnormalities on chest X-ray, those administered corticosteroids showed no benefit but did show possible side effects such as steroid-induced psychosis and avascular necrosis. This review classified the treatment regimens as early treatments and rescue treatments administered in later stages of the disease progression.¹⁰ Russell *et al*¹¹ summarized the results of various case-control studies of SARS patients; they showed a higher incidence of psychosis with high-doses of corticosteroid administration, as well as diabetes, delayed viral clearance, and avascular necrosis. They also reported a delay in viral RNA clearance from the respiratory tract following corticosteroid administration in a MERS-CoV infection.¹¹

Considering these findings, no evidence exists to indicate that the use of corticosteroids will benefit patients infected with 2019-nCoV, and it could worsen their condition. In conclusion, we understand that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is a challenging and unprecedented time for the world. Although few studies do suggest a potential role for the use of corticosteroids in COVID-19 treatment, the current literature does not provide any definitive evidence for or against their use. Thus the use of corticosteroid could be regarded as a double-edged sword. Corticosteroid treatment ought not to be utilized for the treatment of COVID-19 outside of a clinical trial, and caution should be exercised until further evidence regarding corticosteroid use specific to COVID-19 emerges. However, we recommend that clinicians proceed with extreme caution when administering corticosteroids, making it certain that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Author for correspondence: Sohail Kumar, Email: sohailjaipal@yahoo.com

Cite this article: Nasim S, *et al.* (2020). Corticosteroid use for 2019-nCoV infection: A double-edged sword. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, 41: 1244–1245, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ice.2020.165>

Acknowledgments. None.


Financial support. No financial support was provided relevant to this article.

Conflicts of interest. All authors report no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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Borderless collaboration is needed for COVID-19—A disease that knows no borders

Kawthar Mohamed^{1,2}, Eduardo Rodríguez-Román^{3,4}, Farzaneh Rahmani^{5,6}, Hongbo Zhang^{7,8}, Mariya Ivanovska^{9,10}, Sara A. Makka^{11,12}, Musa Joya^{13,14}, Rangarirai Makuku^{1,15}, Md Shahidul Islam^{16,17}, Nesrine Radwan^{18,19}, Laila Rahmah^{1,20}, Rayan Goda^{21,22}, Sunny O. Abarikwu^{23,24}, Mujtaba Shaw^{1,25}, Samaneh Zoghi^{26,27}, Sevan Irtsyan^{28,29}, Irene Ling^{30,31}, Orsolya Cseprekal^{32,33}, Attig-Bahar Faten^{34,35}, Esra Hazar Sayar^{36,37}, Chagajeg Soloukey^{38,39}, Giulia Grancini^{40,41} and Nima Rezaei^{1,42} 

¹School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, ²Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Manama, Bahrain, ³Center for Microbiology and Cell Biology, Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Caracas, Venezuela, ⁴Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Caracas, Venezuela, ⁵Washington University in St Louis, St Louis, Missouri, United States, ⁶Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Missouri, United States, ⁷Pharmaceutical Sciences Laboratory and Turku Bioscience Centre, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, ⁸Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Turku, Finland, ⁹Research Center, Department of microbiology and immunology, Medical University, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, ¹⁰Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Plovdiv, Bulgaria, ¹¹Neuroscience Research Center, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Lebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon, ¹²Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Beirut, Lebanon, ¹³Radiology Department, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Kabul, Afghanistan, ¹⁴Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Kabul, Afghanistan, ¹⁵Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Harare, Zimbabwe, ¹⁶Department of Tissue Engineering and Applied Cell Sciences, School of Advanced Technologies in Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, ¹⁷Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Dhaka, Bangladesh, ¹⁸Allergy & Immunology Unit, Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt, ¹⁹Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Cairo, Egypt, ²⁰Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Jakarta, Indonesia, ²¹Clinical Immunology and Allergy Council, Sudanese Society for Clinical Immunology and Allergy, Khartoum, Sudan, ²²Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Khartoum, Sudan, ²³Department of Biochemistry, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria, ²⁴Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Choba, Nigeria, ²⁵Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Kashmir, India, ²⁶Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Rare and Undiagnosed Diseases, Vienna, Austria, ²⁷Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Vienna, Austria, ²⁸Laboratory Service of Arakbir Medical Center, Yerevan, Armenia, ²⁹Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Yerevan, Armenia, ³⁰School of Science, Monash University Malaysia, Jalan Lagoon Selatan, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, ³¹Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, ³²Department of Transplantation and Surgery, Semmelweis University, Budapest, Hungary, ³³Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Budapest, Hungary, ³⁴Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Tunisia, Tunis, ³⁵University of Rostock, Rostock, Germany, ³⁶Alenya Training and Research Hospital, Pediatric Allergy Immunology Unit, Alanya, Antalya, Turkey, ³⁷Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Antalya, Turkey, ³⁸Department of Neuroscience, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, ³⁹Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Rotterdam, The Netherlands, ⁴⁰Physical Chemistry Unit, Department of Chemistry, University of Pavia, Pavia, Italy, ⁴¹Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Pavia, Italy and ⁴²Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Tehran, Iran

Author for correspondence: Nima Rezaei, E-mail: rezaei_nima@tums.ac.ir

Cite this article: Mohamed K, *et al.* (2020). Borderless collaboration is needed for COVID-19—A disease that knows no borders. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, 41: 1245–1246, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ice.2020.162>

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