

Covid-19 - The Infodemic

Dear Editor,

In the previous issue, authors Reddy and Gupta have rightly highlighted that “in the era of COVID-19 pandemic there is an overabundance of information leading to an ‘infodemic’”, and it is pertinent to empower people only with precise and validated information.^[1] It is the first pandemic to arrive in the era of social media boom. As much devastating as it is, it is also a ‘celebrity disease’. Everyone knows about it, everyone talks about it, and everyone has a piece of advice to give. The infodemic could do more harm than benefit through its communicative, behavioural and clinical consequences.^[2] The fear-mongering seen with the pandemic is unprecedented.^[3]

It seems as if the humankind was relatively safe until Covid-19 made global headlines, and that diarrhoea, malnutrition, tuberculosis, malaria and AIDS were not ‘deadly’ enough. It took the fatality statistics of Covid-19 to bring about better hygiene and sanitation practices that doctors had been screaming hoarse until now.

Covid-19 in the time of ‘viral’ news is disbursing scientific knowledge to the common man that is not only appalling in its magnitude, it is even dangerous. Everyone is eager to learn about the results of drugs trials whether Favipiravir or Lopinavir–Ritonavir, released in the form of ‘breaking news’. It only creates false hopes, shatters them and creates more fear and panic. The news anchors on the 100-odd news channels are seen mispronouncing Remdisivir and Dexamethasone, and the idle viewer is showing eagerness to learn about new treatment options to share it on his next video conference. Whether plasma therapy is successful or if Tocilizumab is curative has become a concern of the society at-large. Why should the general public have access to the results of clinical trials or phased vaccine research?

In spite of the health-care workers and government guidelines reiterating to stick to basics in the management of mild to moderate Covid cases, hoarding of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin has taken place on a large scale.^[4] If just having the latest experimental drug in one’s possession could at least abate anxiety and the sense of impending doom.

When the pandemic subsides, and hope it better does, there should be regulations in information disbursement and access to core scientific research. Perhaps, there can be a dedicated news channel run by scholars available for subscription or paid attendance at CMEs for a genuine audience. The faith in the medical fraternity should be complete that the best is being done

to save lives, and dedicated efforts should be taken to dispel unfounded fears.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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