

The Importance of Compassionate Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Editor,

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is a major public health issue and continues to spread internationally. Since there is no specific anti-viral drug or effective vaccine regime for this disease, the management of this disease mostly focuses on supportive care.^[1] One of the main approaches in providing supportive care is the delivery of compassionate care.^[2] People may experience widespread psychological distress and sufferings due to the fear of the coronavirus infection, physical isolation, dying and losing family members. In this most challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic, compassion, as a stress buffer, can play the main role in relieving the sufferings in life. Compassion is linked to willing self-sacrifice and the characteristic that separates us from the other animals and makes us “human”.^[1] Compassion is often considered as having sensitivity toward suffering and motivates persons to help alleviate the suffering of others.^[2] Compassion encourages giving support and is stimulated by perceiving others as distressed, vulnerable or in need.^[2,3] Some people, such as homeless people, migrants, people in detention, children and women in abusive households, frail older peoples, pregnant women and others, have a greater risk of severe illness from coronavirus and they need more help from others. Therefore, providing compassionate care by healthcare providers could help vulnerable people to feel safe and supported.^[1]

Compassionate messaging and active listening to the patients and families and building a trusting relationship is another attribute of compassionate care that helps patients with COVID-19 to alleviate the sufferings. Compassion can be delivered by small acts of kindness such as a smile, active listening, effective support and providing information. Leamy *et al.*^[4] believe that “small acts of kindness make the unbearable bearable”. Compassion could lead to better physiological regulation and has been linked to reduced Hypothalamic–Pituitary–Adrenal (HPA) axis reactivity, reduced cortisol reactivity, increased parasympathetic nervous system reactivity, reduced cardiovascular reactivity and better immune function; all of these mechanisms reduce stress.^[3] In conclusion, all healthcare providers and societies should nurture and cultivate compassion to recognize the sufferings of human beings in global health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic and take actions to alleviate these sufferings in life.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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