

COVID-19 Perspective from a Hemodialysis Patient

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a novel respiratory virus infection, has emerged in the past few weeks as the worst pandemic in over 100 years. As of April 8, there have been over 1.4 million COVID-19 infections documented worldwide, with over 83,000 deaths. In the United States, there have been over 400,000 infections with over 14,000 deaths. The risk of major complications (including death) from COVID-19 is greater in patients over age 60 years, and those with comorbid conditions, including kidney failure. For this reason, such patients are strongly advised to quarantine themselves to minimize their exposure to this infection. However, when it comes to patients on hemodialysis, they received mixed messages. On the one hand, because they are frequently elderly and have multiple comorbidities (diabetes, kidney failure, cardiac disease, and pulmonary disease), they are encouraged to practice extreme social distancing. On the other hand, they are also advised to continue going to dialysis thrice weekly, where they are in close proximity to other patients and staff for 4 hours at a time, placing them at risk of being infected.

Hemodialysis units have implemented multiple strategies to reduce the risk to patients and staff at hemodialysis units. These measures include requiring dialysis staff to use personal protective equipment, mandating that patients wear a mask during their

dialysis sessions, screening patients on dialysis in the dialysis waiting room for fever or symptoms of COVID-19, and establishing separate dialysis facilities for patients on hemodialysis with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection.

Much has already been written about the challenges in providing dialysis to patients with COVID-19 infections. However, very little attention has been paid to the perspective of the patients on dialysis. Clearly, this experience is extremely stressful for patients on hemodialysis. Attached is an interview with a patient on long-term hemodialysis who was recently suspected of having a COVID-19 infection.

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