

LIVER PATIENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHANGING HEALTH ADVICE DURING THE CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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COVID-19

- The 1st case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Ireland on March 1st 2020.
- The Irish Government with the Health Service Executive and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre have provided the public with very reliable sources of information, on line (gov.ie, HSE.ie and HPSC.ie).
- Immunosuppressed patients in particular were advised to 'cocoon' from the 27th of March. This meant staying at home, without any contact from people outside your own home, (www.gov.ie).

Introduction

- We received worrying enquiries from our own patients with regard to discontinuing their medications, whether or not they should be working and what they should do if they develop COVID-19 symptoms.
- We were concerned that other patients who did not make contact with us were experiencing these same anxieties.
- Previous work by this group demonstrated that patient literacy was poor and this led to further concern for us at this time
- There is no National registry for patients with liver disease or applications to enable us to contact them electronically.

Methods

- Currently, the Hepatology service at Cork University Hospital has 150 patients on immunosuppression for either autoimmune hepatitis (AIH) or following liver transplantation (LT).
 - Of these 150 patients phoned, 132 answered the call (84 AIH: 48LT).
- Our Hepatology nurse phoned all our patients, using an agreed questionnaire which included:
 - Patients' medication list; did they know which ones caused immunosuppression; if they were cocooning, did they know what this meant; did they know the symptoms of COVID-19; and what to do if they developed symptoms.

Results

- 29 patients were excluded: 18 did not answer the call and were sent appropriate information instead; 11 were no longer attending our service or had stopped immunosuppression
- All patients were aware of covid-19 and they all knew the symptoms to watch out for. 90% would contact their GP if they developed worrying symptoms; 24% of AIH and 33% of LT patients would also contact the Department of Hepatology.
- 38 patients did not adhere to the official guideline with regard to cocooning; 43% of female patients and 14% of male patients with AIH continued to go out shopping. Similar numbers of LT patients; 33% of females and 15% of males continued to shop

Immunosuppressed patients, N=132	Autoimmune hepatitis (AIH), N=84	Liver transplantation (LT), N=48
Age median (years)	52 (19-89)	56 (26-78)
Female: Male	59:25	17:31
Covid-19 aware	84 (100%)	48 (100%)
Understood what the term Self-isolation meant	63 (75%)	43 (90%)
Not aware that they were immunosuppressed	20 (24%)	8 (17%)
Not cocooning	29 (35%)	9(19%)
Reasons for not cocooning:		
Shopping	29 (35%)	8(17%)
Working	11 (13%)	1 (2%)
Not aware	20 (24%)	8 (17%)

Conclusion

- This enquiry has shown us that the public health notices regarding Covid-19 have been well received and understood.
- However, there is a worrying gap in patient knowledge with 29% of patients assessed were not aware they were in a vulnerable group and were not adhering to correct guidance.
- This study highlighted the importance of having an up to date in house database in the absence of a national registry which allowed us to maintain patient contact and give clear advice when health recommendations change.
- Following completion of this survey, two patients with AIH have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have made full recovery. Two patients with LT have been diagnosed with COVID-19 as well and as of this timepoint, are still in hospital.

