

Webinar Series

Promoting health throughout the life-course during the COVID-19 pandemic series

Webinar 7: Long-term care of older people during COVID-19

Wednesday, 30 September 2020, 13:00 hrs (IST)

Summary

Background

Long-term care facilities play an important role in the health system particularly for the aged and the chronically ill. The development of long-term care in the health systems of the South-East Asia Region remains unsatisfactory. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected older people disproportionately, especially those living in long-term care facilities. It has been observed that long-term care recipients are most susceptible to COVID-19 and its complications. In many countries, evidence shows that more than 50% of COVID-19-related deaths have been linked to long-term care facilities, with figures being as high as 80% in some high-income countries. Furthermore, in countries of the South-East Asia Region, where access to institutional long-term health services is limited, older persons were also often among the caregivers responding to the pandemic, increasing their risk of exposure to the virus. To address the vulnerability of long-term care recipients in home, community, and institutions during the COVID 19 pandemic, greater intervention is essential.

The seventh webinar in this series “**Long-term care of older people during COVID-19**” was scheduled at 13:00 hrs (IST) on Wednesday, 30 September 2020. The prevention and management of COVID-19 across long-term care services, strategies to ensure the safety and dignity of older people, and the stress of caring for the terminally ill during the COVID-19 pandemic were presented.

Objective

The objective of the webinar was to discuss WHO guidance on preventing and managing COVID-19 across long term care services, strategies to ensure the safety and dignity of older people in long term care facilities, and the stress of caring for the terminally ill during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Presentations

- Preventing and managing COVID-19 across long term care services: WHO guidance
- Residential and long-term care facilities: Strategies to ensure the safety and dignity of older people
- Stress caring for the terminally ill during the COVID-19 pandemic

Target audience

Program officers from ministries of health, professionals, nurses, academics, technical officers from the UN and other partners.

About 2100 invitations were sent for the event, out of which 340 registered and **254 participants attended the webinar.**

Technical resources

Coordinators	Moderator	Presenters
<p>Dr Neena Raina Senior Adviser, MCA, WHO, SEARO New Delhi</p> <p>Dr Dileep Mavalankar Director, Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat</p>	<p>Dr Arvind Mathur Director, Asian Center for Medical Education, Research and Innovation, Jodhpur and Editor, Journal of the Indian Academy of Geriatrics</p>	<p>Dr Zee-A Han Medical Officer, Ageing Health Unit, Long-Term Care, Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child Adolescent Health & Ageing; WHO-HQ, Geneva</p> <p>Ms Caitlin Littleton Regional Programme Adviser-Care and Health; HelpAge International Asia-Pacific Regional Office Chiang Mai, Thailand</p> <p>Dr Sushma Bhatnagar Professor & Head Department of Onco-Anesthesia, Pain & Palliative Medicine AIIMS, New Delhi</p>

Summary

Dr Neena Raina delivered the welcome address followed by a brief introduction of the topic and the panelists for the day. Dr Dileep Mavalankar highlighted the collaboration and details of IIPH and courses being offered. The event was moderated by Dr Arvind Mathur.

Presentation 1

Preventing and managing COVID-19 across long term care services: WHO guidance – Dr Zee-A Han, WHO, Geneva

Dr Han gave an overview of long-term facilities and key findings of a few systematic review. She mentioned that as people get older, there was an increased risk of deaths. The data from long-term care facilities (LTCFs) shows that over 50% of COVID-19 deaths occurred in LTCFs. In many high-income countries, the drivers of the COVID burden was linked to long-term care facilities. The extent of COVID-19 infection rates in LTCFs has varied widely between and within countries. Outbreak investigations in LTCFs found COVID-19 incidence rates of between 0.0% and 71.7% among residents and between 1.5% and 64.0% among staff. The case fatality for LTC residents which accounted for up to 50% of all death in some countries; were higher in LTCFs as compared to age matched non-resident ageing population.

The high rates of incidence and later high case fatality were possibly due to lack of awareness and adherence to established infection prevention and control (IPC) measures; under-prioritization of PPE provision, testing, and medical support in LTCFs. Spread of

infection in LTCFs were also related to facility infrastructure, where establishment of isolation areas was not possible; and employment of LTCF staff in multiple facilities and thereby carrying infection from one facility to another. High case fatality was also contributed by high susceptibility to severe COVID-19, multimorbidity and general frail nature of pre-morbid health. She highlighted the importance of IPC in prevention of COVID-19 in LTCFs and referred to the WHO IPC guidance for LTCFs. She emphasized that mere presence of guidance would not be able to make an impact of COVID-19 transmission in LTCFs unless there is support from governments of Member States.

Presentation 2

Residential and long-term care facilities: Strategies to ensure the safety and dignity of older people. Ms Caitlin Littleton, HelpAge International Asia Pacific Regional Office, Thailand

Ms Littleton provided a perspective on functioning of care homes and the genesis of high infection and case fatality rates related to COVID-19 infection. LTCFs have attracted a lot of attention due to high rates of infection and case fatality, which varied widely. While high income countries reported very high fatality, LTCFs from LMICs have not reported such high figures. She also pointed out that in the SEA Region, majority of people with care needs lives at home at all income levels and with affordability; families may hire formal care givers. But not many people live in large and expensive private LTCFs. She referred to COVID-19 Guidance issued by WHO and HelpAge International as important starting points for long-term care during the pandemic. She highlighted the need for person-centred care for older persons. She concluded that infection control measures should be in place while making all efforts to ensure safety and dignity of people who are leaving in residential facilities and invest in developing national care systems by adopting policies and programs that cover the whole the life course.

Presentation 3

Stress caring for the terminally ill during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr SushmaBhatnagar, Department of Onco–Anaesthesia, Pain & Palliative Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi

Prof Bhatnagar shared her experience of providing palliative and end-of-life care to cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. She enumerated the challenges of balancing the contagious disease with terminal disease under the lockdown where most facilities were limited. She continued her palliative care service while providing COVID-19 intensive care to non-cancer patients. She highlighted that important role of telemedicine in such a situation. Before COVID it was underutilized in settings of palliative and end-of-life care. She shared her experience of tele-palliative care in about 1000 cases during this period. Her tele-palliative care service included symptoms management, information about chemotherapy, palliative counselling and end-of-life care. She recommended that telemedicine would be the way forward if the pandemic persists. She concluded that while COVID-19 care is important; non-COVID patients should also be cared for. Whether a patient is COVID positive or terminally ill, humanity is a wonder drug and provides a 100% cure. There is no overdose or under-dose and provide the concept of total care which is vital for COVID-19 as well as terminally ill patients.

The presentations were followed by comments from the moderator who summarized the important points in the presentations. Audience questions were taken up by the panellists which generated an interesting discussion on this complex topic.

Concluding remarks

Dr Neena Raina delivered the concluding remarks by emphasizing the need for Member States to deliberate on issues of long-term care in the health and social welfare system to evolve an effective care system which is culturally appropriate and financially sustainable. SEARO has already carried out preliminary exercise in this area and Member States can adopt the measures suggested with modification if required. She thanked the audience, the panellists, the moderator and the hosts for the successful conduct of the webinar.

The webinar ended at 14:40 hrs.