

Webinar Summary Report

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

Webinar 10: Managing access to essential health services to older people during COVID-19 pandemic

Wednesday, 21 October 2020, 13:00 hrs (IST)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and non-pharmacological public health measures for its prevention have posed hitherto unknown challenges for the health system. With rare exceptions, most countries in the world and the region have been afflicted with the pandemic and have adopted restrictive public health measures in absence of a curative drug or vaccine. During this period, maintaining essential services has been challenging for the health systems. This virtual collapse of essential health services including health promotion, preventive, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitative and palliative services are likely to have serious adverse health effects, especially on the most vulnerable populations, such as children, people living with chronic conditions or disabilities, and older people. The disruptions in essential services are widespread across the globe. Almost every country (90%) experienced a disruption to some extent, with greater disruptions being reported in low- and middle-income than in high-income countries.

Older people are much more likely to have non-communicable diseases like cancer, double the rate of disability, and experience poorer mental health. This leads to a higher dependency on and higher usage of primary healthcare. Measures like social distancing, self-isolation, and travel restrictions disproportionately disrupted the livelihoods of the older population and their access to routine but life-preserving healthcare.

The tenth webinar in “*Promoting health throughout the life-course during the COVID-19 pandemic*” series, “Managing access to essential health services to older people during COVID-19 pandemic” was conducted at 13:00 hrs (IST) on Wednesday, 21 October 2020 to discuss issues related to management of COVID-19 in the older population from a health system point of view.

Objective

The objective of this webinar was to share WHO guidance on the management of COVID-19 in older people, challenges in the management, and innovations in improving access to health care and prevention of the decline in the intrinsic capacity of older population.

Presentations

- Management of COVID in the older population: WHO Guidance
- Challenges in the management of older COVID patients in intensive care

- Innovations in ensuring health care services for the older population during COVID pandemic
- Preventing a decline in intrinsic capacity amongst older people: the ICOPE implementation Pilot program

Target audience

The target audience included program officers from ministries of health, health care professionals, academics, technical officers from the UN, non-profit organization, professional societies, and other partners. 2400 invitations were sent for the webinar, out of which 428 invitees registered and 296 attended the webinar. This report presents a summary of the presentations and discussions and feedback received from participants on the presentations.

Technical resources

Coordinators	Moderator	Presenters
<p>Dr Neena Raina Senior Adviser, MCA WHO SEARO, New Delhi</p> <p>Dr Shyam Pingle Senior Occupational Health Specialist & Adjunct Professor on behalf of Dr Dileep Mavalankar, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat</p>	<p>Dr A.B. Dey Consultant Healthy Ageing, MCA WHO SEARO, New Delhi</p>	<p>Dr Yuka Sumi Medical Officer Ageing and Health Department of Maternal, Newborn Child & Adolescent Health, and Ageing, Division of UHC / Life Course (UHL), WHO, Geneva</p> <p>Dr Anjan Trikha Professor Department of Anaesthesiology, Pain Medicine and Critical Care, AIIMS, New Delhi</p> <p>Dr Kitti Larpsombatsiri Director Bureau of Elderly Health, Department of Health Ministry of Public Health, Thailand</p> <p>Prof Michael Valenzuela Project Manager & Core Research Team, ICOPE Implementation Pilot Program, WHO, Geneva</p>

Summary

Dr Neena Raina welcomed the participants, introduced the panelists and the moderator; and explained the background of these binary series by WHO-SEARO. Dr Shyam Pingle on behalf of Dr Dileep Mavalankar, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat; highlighted the collaboration and details of IIPH and courses being offered. The event was moderated by Dr A.B. Dey.

Presentation 1

Management of COVID-19 in the older population- WHO Guidance. Dr Yuka Sumi, WHO, Geneva

Dr Sumi provided an overview of care for older adults during COVID-19 based on data from 71 countries. She highlighted the higher risk of serious disease and case fatality among older patients and stressed that the risk increases exponentially with age. Though there is no typical older person and management needs to be individualized, WHO has been providing guidance on management strategies from time to time as the pandemic is progressing and unfolding of its epidemiology. During the pandemic WHO has adopted the theme of “Decade of Healthy Ageing” as the guidance for promoting healthy ageing globally. She provided the salient features of activities to be undertaken during the decade to ensure health and wellbeing throughout the life course.

Presentation 2

Challenges in the management of older COVID patients in intensive care: Dr AnjanTrikha, AIIMS, New Delhi

Prof Trikha provided a detailed account of clinical features of severe COVID-19 infection as was observed in the Intensive Care Unit of a dedicated COVID-19 hospital in New Delhi. He had noted poor outcome of older patients in ICU and provided the protocol of treatment which evolved as experience increased and in tune with guidance from various international journals, WHO and Government guidance. He dealt with the issues related to impact of co-morbidity, decision making process in seriously ill older patients, end of life care and unique clinical problems encountered in the ICU.

Presentation 3

Innovations in ensuring health care services for the older population during the COVID pandemic: Dr Kitti Larpsombatsiri, Bureau of Elderly Health, Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand

Dr Larpsombatsiri, provided the experience of prevention and management of COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand, which has reported one of the lowest infection and case fatality rates in the world, demonstrating the strength of health care system. He ascribed the success in pandemic management and low case fatality to strength in public health system, adoption of preventive measures by citizens, adoption of technology in home and hospital care; participation of civil society organizations in pandemic control.

Presentation 4

Preventing a decline in intrinsic capacity amongst older people: the ICOPE implementation Pilot program: Prof Michael Valenzuela, WHO, Geneva

Prof Valenzuela considered that there is a challenge in promoting healthy aging during the pandemic as WHO defines it as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age”. So functional ability which is at the top of the pyramid of healthy aging construct is determined by intrinsic capacity and its interaction with the challenges of surrounding environment. In the setting of a serious pandemic and consequent public health intervention of isolation, older people all over the world are facing a major crisis to healthy ageing. He provided detailed insight into the pre-determined intervention of WHO in the form of integrated care for older people (ICOPE) and its relevance in the pandemic period.

Discussion

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 interesting discussion on this complex topic. Issues raised and discussed after the presentations included; frequency of guidance from the WHO on various issues related to COVID-19, effect of age and co-morbidity on outcome from COVID-19 infection, technologies used in old age care in Thailand, and ICOPE screening in community.

Concluding remarks

Dr Neena Raina delivered the concluding remarks by emphasizing the need for Member States to deliberate on issues of improving access to health care during the pandemic. She advised the Member States to report innovations and best practices adopted by them which can be adopted by other countries.