



Effects of the pandemic on emergency department visits

Serdar ÖZDEMİR*

Department of Emergency Medicine, Health Sciences University, Ümraniye Training and Research Hospital, İstanbul, Turkey

Received: 20.03.2022

Accepted/Published Online: 01.07.2022

Final Version: 30.08.2022

Dear editor,

We read with great interest the article titled "The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on acute appendicitis cases" prepared by Büyükakıncak et al. and published in the 2022 second issue of your journal (1). We thank the authors and editorial board for this article that discusses the non-COVID-19 effects of the pandemic on public health. As emergency medicine specialists, we would like to make a few contributions to the discussion on the impact of the pandemic on emergency department visits.

With the first case seen in Turkey on March 11, 2020, all community and health managers were alert (2). Two new prominent pandemic hospitals were built in our city. Public hospitals also established their own pandemic services. Along with this organizational change, a change was achieved in the standards of patient admission in the emergency department. Emergency services were organized as pandemic rooms and clean rooms. Patients with COVID-19-like symptoms were directed to the pandemic rooms from the hospital entrance. They were treated in these areas to prevent contamination (3). Health workers who met patients at the hospital entrance greeted the patients with protective clothing and triaged according to the patient's symptoms. This situation caused anxiety in society (4). Being in direct contact with patients with COVID-19-like symptoms had also caused anxiety in healthcare workers (5).

Another logical reason for the society's hesitation about applying to the emergency service and the anxiety of the hospital may be the "HES" application developed by the Ministry of Health. With this application, the regions where people with a positive PCR test for SARS-CoV-2 are concentrated are marked in red on the map. During the entire pandemic period, hospitals were marked red in this

application (6). Realizing that hospitals are risky areas, the public may have hesitated to come to the hospital, especially those with comorbidities.

The annual number of emergency service applications in Turkey is higher than the country's population. However, emergency service applications suddenly decreased with the announcement of the measures during the pandemic process. Decreased number of applications was observed in emergency diagnoses as well as non-emergency diagnoses. Although the pandemic has placed an extra burden on the health system, the health system in Turkey did not collapse. In fact, despite the closure of non-emergency clinics during the peak periods of the pandemic, our clinical experience has shown that the burden of the emergency service in Turkey during the pandemic period has decreased compared to the pre-pandemic period (6). On the other hand, the closure of non-emergency clinics and the postponement of elective surgeries may have caused non-COVID-19 patients to become more complicated in the emergency department (8). The pandemic has caused new normal in the health organization as well as in community life.

References

1. Büyükakıncak S, Turan M, Ateş G, Mataracı E, Aydın A. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on acute appendicitis cases. J Exp Clin Med. 2022; 39(2): 398-402.
2. Koca F. Promotion of scientific research on COVID-19 in Turkey. Lancet. 2020; 396(10253):e25-6. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31864-X
3. Özdemir S, Akça HŞ, Algin A, Altunok İ, Eroğlu SE. Effectiveness of the rapid emergency medicine score and the rapid acute physiology score in prognosticating mortality in patients presenting to the emergency department with COVID-19 symptoms. Am J Emerg Med. 2021 Nov;49:259-264. doi: 10.1016/j.ajem.2021.06.020.

4. Cao H, Zuo C, Li G, et al. A Cross-Sectional Study of Psychological Status in Different Epidemic Areas in China After the COVID-19 Outbreak. *Front Psychiatry*. 2020;11:575705. doi:10.3389/fpsy.2020.575705
5. Özdemir S, Akça HŞ, Algın A, et al. The effect of the Coronavirus 2019 pandemic on the mental health of healthcare workers *Ann Clin Anal Med*. 2021;12(12):1348-1352. doi: 10.4328/ACAM.20745
6. Aktura B, Koç K, Derinpınar MA, Aktura, N. Hayat Eve Sığar uygulaması yoğunluk haritasından İstanbul'un ilçeleri ve bölgelerinin Covid-19 riskinin skorlanması. *Ankara Med J*. 2021; 21(1):217-9. doi:10.5505/amj.2021.48379
7. Çıkrıkçı Işık G, Çevik Y. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on visits of an urban emergency department. *Am J Emerg Med*. 2021 Apr;42:78-82. doi: 10.1016/j.ajem.2021.01.011.
8. Ozdemir S. Patient with Profound Anemia due to Hemorrhoids during the Pandemic Period. *J Coll Physicians Surg Pak*. 2021; 31(Supp2):160. doi: 10.29271/jcsp.2021.Supp2.S160