

Retrospective Study about Fear from COVID-19 That Makes the Patients Reluctant to Present to Otolaryngology Outpatients Clinic in Medina of Basra Province in Iraq

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of the study was to assess the difference in numbers and nature of otolaryngology outpatient clinic presentation during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) era. **Materials and Methods:** A retrospective comparative study was performed in a single hospital (Medina General Hospital); all data were obtained by reviewing outpatient clinic data records for March, April, and May 2020. The corresponding period from 2019 was also collected for comparison. **Results:** A total of 551 patients were seen in the otolaryngology department of the outpatient clinic during the COVID-19 era of March, April, and May 2020, compared to 1837 patients who were seen in the same period of 2019 making around 70% drop in the total number of patients visiting ENT outpatient clinic during the COVID-19 era of 2020. **Conclusion:** Fear of getting COVID-19 infection along with enforcement of quarantine and social distancing resulted in a great drop in the quantity and quality of patients consulting outpatient clinic in Medina General Hospital during March, April, and May 2020.

Keywords: 2019, Basra, COVID-19, otolaryngology

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) used the term 2019 novel coronavirus to refer to a coronavirus that affects the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China on December 29, 2019.^[1] The WHO announced that the official name of the 2019 novel coronavirus is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and the current reference name for the virus is severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).^[2] Cases of COVID-19 have now been reported in more than 120 countries worldwide, and the WHO declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020.^[3] In Iraq, the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Najaf city on February 24, 2020, while the first reported COVID-19 case in Basra was recorded on February 29, 2020. The first recorded case of COVID-19 in Medina district, Basra was on March 25, 2020 according to the data records of Medina General Hospital.

In this study, we will record the number of patients consulting the otolaryngology outpatient clinic of Medina General Hospital during March, April, and May 2020, comparing these findings with a similar period in 2019.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Setting

This retrospective, comparative study was done at a single center in the otolaryngology department in the outpatient clinic of Medina General Hospital, Basra, Iraq.

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Patients

The study population was all patients consulting the otolaryngology department of Medina General Hospital, Basra, Iraq during March, April, and May 2020, the first 3 months after the outbreak of COVID-19, comparing these findings with a similar period in 2019.

Data collection

The data were collected by reviewing hospital records and otolaryngology outpatient clinic sample data from Medina General hospital. The patients' identities were kept hidden and approval from the hospital directory, ethical and legal sections were obtained.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019.

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles that have their origin in the Declaration of Helsinki. It was carried out with the patients' verbal and analytical approval before the samples were taken. The study protocol and the subject information and consent form were reviewed and approved by a local ethics committee.

RESULTS

A total of 551 patients consulted the otolaryngology department in the outpatient clinic of Medina General Hospital in March, April, and May 2020, 296 patients were in March 2020 making 53.7% of the total number, 49 patients were only in April 2020 representing 8.9% of the total number of patients, and 206 patients visited otolaryngology department in the outpatient clinic of Medina General hospital in May 2020 making about 37.4% of the total number of patients in 2020. These data are shown in Figure 1.

Comparing to the same period in 2019, 1837 patients visited the otolaryngology department of the outpatient clinic in Medina General Hospital during March, April, and May 2019. A total of 646 patients representing 35.1% consulted the ENT outpatient clinic in March, 863 patients representing 47% consulted during April, and 328 patients visited the ENT outpatient clinic during May, representing 17.9% of the total patients in that period of 2019 as shown in Figure 2.

There is a drop in the total number of patients presented to otolaryngology outpatient clinic during the COVID-19 era in 2020 compared to the patients presented in the same period in 2019 by 70%.

The nature of the presentation was classified into the following:

1. Emergency complaints like a foreign body in the ear, nose and throat area, epistaxis, and trauma.
2. Nonemergency complaints including all other complaints like rhinitis, sinusitis, ear infection, and others.

The emergency complaints during March, April, and May 2020 represent around 28.6% of the total complaints, whereas during the same period of 2019 it was 4.4% as shown in Figure 3.

DISCUSSION

The first COVID-19 case in Medina district was recorded on March 25, 2020, but the news of infection in other regions of the country and the world travel fast in the whole of March down to April 2020 resulting in great fear and anxiety of getting infected. The enforcement of healthy quarantine and work closure by the higher committee of health and safety in Iraq during March, April, and to a lesser effect in May 2020 resulted in a decrease in the number of patients' consultations to the outpatient clinic in the hospital.

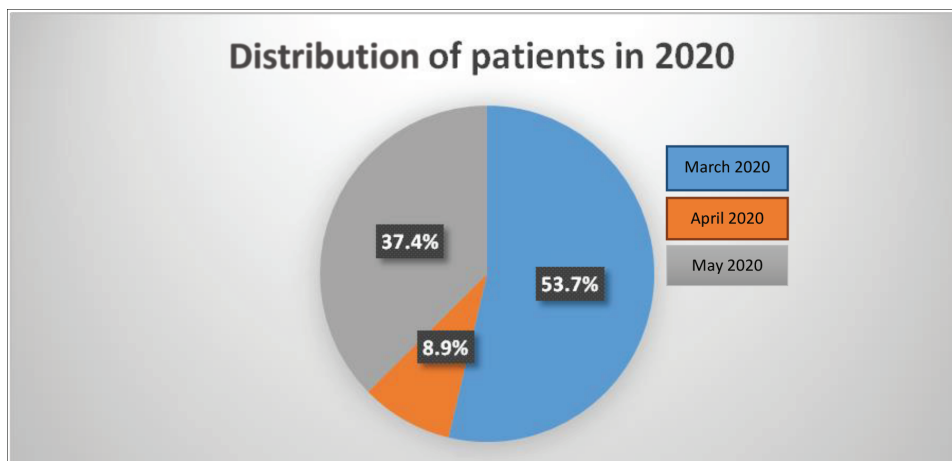


Figure 1: Frequency of distribution of patients presented to otolaryngology department in Medina General Hospital during 2020

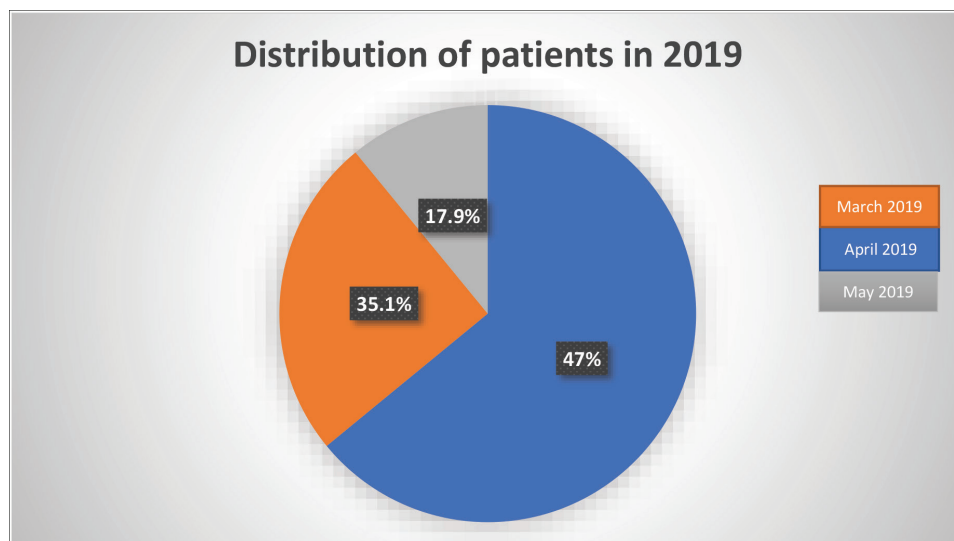


Figure 2: Frequency of distribution of patients presented to otolaryngology department in Medina General Hospital during 2019

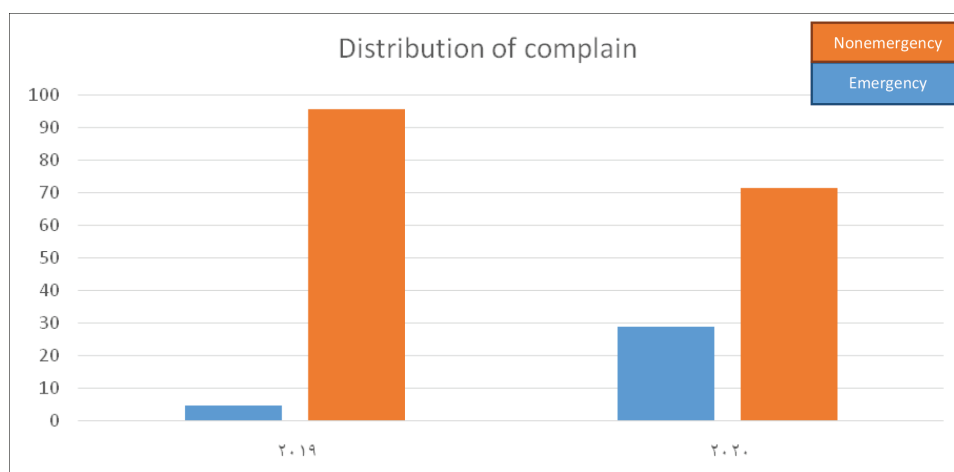


Figure 3: Frequency of distribution of patient's complaints presented to otolaryngology outpatient clinic in Medina General Hospital during March, April, and May in 2019 compared to the same period in 2020

In this study, we found a dramatic drop in the number of outpatient clinic consultations in the first 3 months after recording COVID-19 cases in Iraq; March, April, and March 2020 up to 70% compared to the number of consultations to the outpatient clinic in the same period in 2019. The total number had drop from 1837 patients in 2019 to 551 patients in 2020. This as we said might be attributed to the fear and anxiety of getting COVID-19 infection and the enforcement of health quarantine by the local authorities.

The quantity and quality of patients presented to the outpatient clinic also differed during the COVID-19 era with an increasing number of emergency complaints (28.6%) in 2020 compared to the complaints (4.4%) in 2019. This might be explained by the total drop in patients' number in 2020 as compared with 2019 making only patients with new or urgent complaints consult the hospital outpatient clinic rather than old and recurrent complaints.

The decline in the number of patients consulting ENT outpatient clinics in this study was similar to the findings of David AK,^[4] Kowalski LP,^[5] and Givi B.^[6]

CONCLUSION

Fear and anxiety from getting COVID-19 infection along with enforcement of quarantine resulted in a great drop in the quantity and quality of patients consulting outpatient clinics in Medina General Hospital during March, April, and May 2020.

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Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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