Letter

PediaVirus chatline: all together against COVID-19

On occasion of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Italy, during the outbreak period, 140 professionals, including paediatricians (the majority), general health practitioners, infectious diseases specialists, epidemiologists, neuropsychiatrists, neurologists, psychologists, pharmaceutical representatives, magistrates, predominantly Italian but also from other countries in Europe and beyond, created a chatline to share their own experiences.

The chat, created on WhatsApp and called 'Pediavirus', has proven to be very helpful to share knowledge on experiences, already-codified and off label therapies, innovative medical proposals by participating doctors, psychological help to those involved first hand (and to their patients), international guidelines, epidemiological tables and daily stats on number of infected/requiring intensive care/deceased; yet, despite the dramatic moment, irony has never gone missing.

The chat has gradually and autonomously gained its own structure and schedule. Paediatricians acted as a sort of local envoys because they were distributed in all the health centres of Campania and in most of the Italian regions from where they could provide comments, rumours and news ahead of the daily official press briefing by the government.

We analysed about 100 000 messages written in the chat over about 2 months, that is, since the outbreak of the epidemic in Italy up until today with phase II is approaching. At the beginning, the messages (1000/day on average) were almost exclusively ironical/sarcastic; however, over time, content shifted towards statistics, epidemiological grids and symptomatology and humorous messages supplanted by those related to codified therapies¹ (already in use even if off label), innovative therapies or entirely new therapeutic ideas derived from the single clinical practice.² Discussions have also focused on the psychological/neuropsychiatric aspect of doctors, nurses and affected subjects (either in quarantine or home bound as for Italy's current regulations), as well as the neurological symptoms. Finally, more recently, the attention has shifted to COVID-19's socioeconomic implications, which

Figure 1 (A) Number of daily messages divided in topics during Italian pandemic. (B) New daily cases of COVID-19 during Italian pandemic.

appear to be increasingly relevant and burdensome (figure 1).

The spirit of great collaboration that was born in the chat 'Pediavirus' is noteworthy and, in some ways, must be considered the real novelty and strength of the system. The chat among professionals, initially almost born from the desire of health professionals to contact each other with 'playful' purposes, has revealed to be fundamental for doctors, nurses, COVID-19 paediatric patients and their parents, as an imaginative way to deal with the emergency in a constructive experience.³ Only a handful of professionals have abandoned the project, predominantly due to the huge number of messages received daily. We have also been assisted by psychologists, neurologists and neuropsychiatrists, since the management of the mental aspect in this unique crisis is of crucial importance for patients, doctors, nurses and anyone else involved first-hand to fight the viral infection. Each member

of the group has been allocated a clear role, that has been respected by all, greatly improving clinical management, prevention measures and the relationship between medical staff, the young patients and their families.

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