

Original Article**AWARENESS REGARDING SWINE FLU AMONGST PATIENTS ATTENDING SWINE FLU OPD IN A TERTIARY CARE CENTER IN SOUTH GUJARAT**

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ABSTRACT

Swine flu is caused by novel Influenza A H1N1 virus that causes pandemic in the world within short period of time. Government of India had institute a series of preventive actions and efforts to improve the awareness of swine flu in general public. The aim of this study is to evaluate general awareness and attitude towards swine flu amongst the patients. This was a cross sectional study of 50 randomly selected patients who attended swine flu OPD in a tertiary center using pretested questionnaire.

Among participants 86% were male and 14% were females with more than 90% having education above primary schooling level. Major source of information for swine flu was news paper(34%) and TV(29%). 90% of patients came for the first time to a public hospital for swine flu testing. Most of the patients were aware of the mode of spread and its prevention methods. Almost half of participants believed that it's a deadly disease and movement of the people from the affected area should be restricted. The fear of pandemic was not able to crush peoples' spirit for leading a good life and most of patients were ready to help prevent its spread.

Key words: Swine flu, Awareness, Mode of spread

INTRODUCTION

Influenza (Flu) pandemics are caused by new influenza viruses that have recently adapted to humans and resemble major natural disasters both in terms of recurrence and magnitude.¹ Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A Influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks in pigs and sporadic cases occurs in human being. The most recent one is the infection of human being by novel Influenza A H1N1 virus that causes pandemic of swine flu in the world. The first case of current pandemic of swine flu was reported in Mexico on 18th March 2009 and spreads rapidly throughout the world within short period of time² The First confirm case of swine flu in India was on 16th May 2009, who was the traveler from USA at Hyderabad airport since than cases were on rise tremendously.³ Government of India had institute a series of preventive actions that include surveillance at Ports and International Airports, Surveillance through Integrated Disease Surveillance units in the States.⁴ Most of the cities in the India were put on high alert and a separate OPD was started in almost every Medical college of the country to tackle cases. These OPDs provides consulting, counseling, testing and treatment of suspected swine flu patients. Health department started IEC through posters, television advertisements, pamphlets etc. The aim of this study is to evaluate general awareness and attitude towards swine flu amongst the patients attending

the swine flu OPD in a tertiary care hospital in Surat city of South Gujarat.

METHODOLOGY

This was a cross sectional study of 50 randomly selected patients who attended swine flu OPD in a tertiary center. The study was conducted in the August 2009, when the number of the patients in the OPD was on rise. All patients were given pretested questionnaire which consists of questions with multiple answers. Patients who were not able to read were helped in filling the questionnaire and verbal consent was taken before filling the same.

Inclusion Criteria: Patient attending the swine flu OPD of tertiary care hospital in Surat city with WHO swine flu category A and B⁵ and age more than 18 years were included in the study. Patient with WHO swine flu category C were not included in the study due to their seriousness of illness. Patient not willing to participate in the study were excluded.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Out of 50 cases 86% were male and 14% were females suggesting poor accessibility of females to health services and secondly it was males who travel and go out of the city for business purpose, so they are more afraid of getting the swine flu. In the present study 56% of the patients were graduates, 36% studied up to secondary schooling

and 8% completed primary education. The government has done strong efforts to increase the awareness of swine flu in general population to limit its spread using various IEC material and mass media equipments. In the present study 34% of patients has accepted news paper as a source of information regarding swine flu, 29% gets information from TV, 17% from other people, 12% from radio and 5% from posters. This shows that educated people were more sensitive towards the pandemic and because it is a new disease, awareness for the same might be less in uneducated people. Secondly, news paper and TV seems to be strong medium for epidemic awareness in the present communication.

Table 1: Source of Information

Source Information	Frequency (%)
TV	27(54.0)
Radio	12(24.0)
Newspaper	31(62.0)
Poster	5(10.0)
Other people	17(34.0)

Among the participants 90% came to public hospital for the first time while 10% had come earlier too. Reason given by patients for the visiting of this hospital was testing for swine flu by 70%, 12% patients came for their satisfaction, 10% patients were referred by other doctor and 8% came for treatment. The reason behind this was during initial phase testing and treatment was available only in public sector hospitals. Most of the patients wanted to confirm whether they are suffering from swine flu or other type of flu. Among the respondents 52% of the patients thought of infected with swine flu because they had the symptoms of swine flu, while 22% patients thought that they might have got swine flu because they have visited an affected area, 12% of the patients came into contact with common cold patients while 8% had come in contact with a confirmed swine flu case. In the early phase of the pandemic, half of the patients just came out of fear to know whether they are suffering from swine flu which is a natural reaction towards a new disease.

Table 2: Reason for coming to the hospital

Reason	Frequency (%)
For Treatment (Self initiated)	4(8.0)
For Testing only	35(70.0)
For Treatment - Referred	5(10.0)
For Satisfaction	6(12.0)

When asked regarding the severity of swine flu, 50% perceived it as a deadly disease and 42%

were afraid of the disease. As the swine flu is a new disease and it is declared as a pandemic most of the people reacted in that way. Human to human transmission of swine flu occur through coughing or sneezing by infected person, touching or handling objects contaminated by swine flu virus and spreads quickly in crowded places.¹ On asking regarding mode of spread, 88% thought sneezing, 62% perceived crowded places, 38% thought sharing towels and 14% thought touch as the reasons for spread. It shows that most of the patients were aware of mode of transmission of disease. Among the respondents, 86% claimed that they use handkerchief while sneezing or coughing while 14% didn't do so.

Table 3: Knowledge on Mode of Transmission

Mode of Transmission	Frequency (%)
Crowded places	31(62.0)
Sharing towels	19(38.0)
Sneezing and coughing	44(88.0)
Touch	7(14.0)

When asked regarding their routine life, 76% of the parents told that they are allowing their children to go school while 24% didn't allow doing so. Only 18% respondents were not going to their workplace, rest of them(82%) were regularly going to jobs. 54% patients agreed that they go for shopping at crowded places while 46% avoided doing so. In this study we can see that most of the patients continued with their routine activity except for avoiding crowded areas by half (46%) of the people.

Out of 50 patients 92% told that they can help to prevent spread of the disease while 8% were not sure whether they can contribute in that. About 60% patients told that they will be able to homebound themselves after going back from here while 40% were not able to do so. So, most of the patients were ready to contribute to prevent spread of the disease but significant numbers of the patients (40%) were not able to do so because of their job and other social liabilities.

On asking whether people should be allowed to come to India or to South Gujarat, 45% were in favor of allowing the visitors while 22% were against it. 32% patients were in favor of testing all the people who were coming from affected areas. This suggests that most of patients were afraid of spread of the disease from other affected areas and they wanted to prevent the same by testing or restricting the movement of the people.

SUMMARY

In the present pandemic testing and treatment facilities were limited to tertiary care centers in initial phase of the pandemic, most of the patients came for the first time to a public hospital for swine flu testing. Most of them were educated and aware of the mode of spread and its prevention methods. A large number of people believed that it's a deadly disease and movement of the people from the affected area should be restricted. The fear of pandemic was not able to crush peoples' spirit for leading a good life.

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