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Letter to the Editor

COVID-19, a new opportunity for global health education ☆



COVID-19, una nueva oportunidad para la educación sanitaria global

Dear Editor:

Foreseeably, the current COVID-19 pandemic will become a starting point for the creation of a new paradigm in our customary lifestyle modifying uses and habits in our social and working relationships as well as health measures as a result of the devastating effects that this coronavirus is having in our environment.

In recent weeks large amount of papers have been published discussing the recommendations to be followed in the

public health environment in order to minimize risks derived from interactions with potentially infected patients as well as to avoid possible contagions in hospital environments. In what concerns our specialty, compliance with preventive protocols is even more crucial due to the idiosyncrasy of daily routine involved in ophthalmological examinations.^{1–5} However, while patient visits to consulting rooms has diminished due to measures such as extending intervals between appointments or the use of telephone consultations for deferrable disorders, the Ophthalmological Emergency Dept. has remained

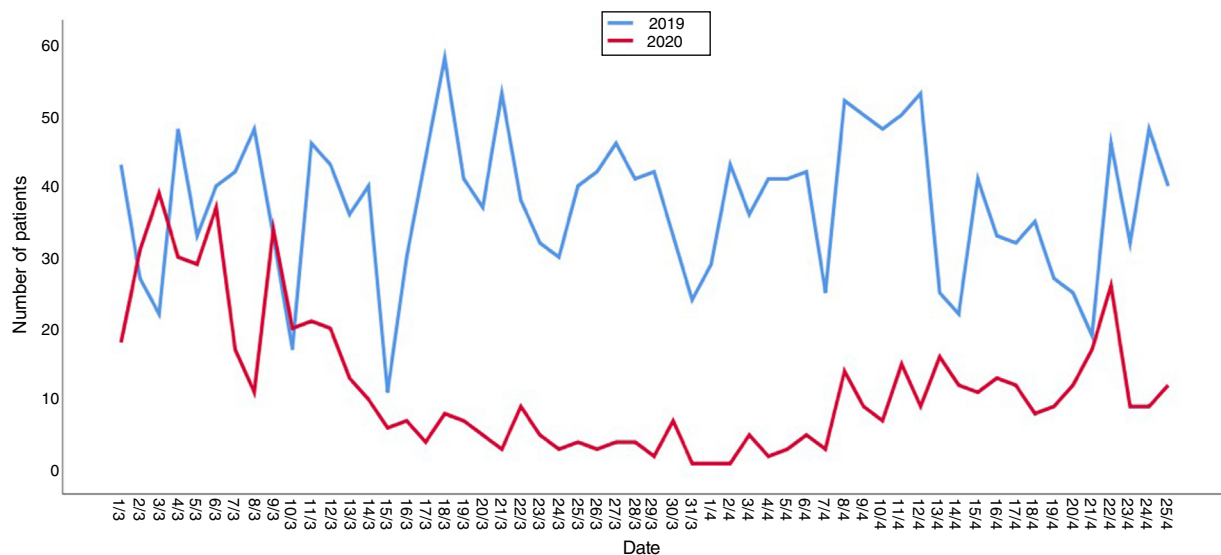


Fig. 1 – Comparison between the number of patient visits to the Ophthalmological Emergency Dept. of the Virgen de la Victoria University Hospital (Málaga) between March 1 and April 25 in the past 2 years.

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available since the onset of the pandemic to provide care to severe cases regardless of the restrictions in force due to the nationwide quarantine.

We are all aware of the high rates of visits to Ophthalmological Emergency services, in most cases due to the appearance of insignificant diseases or as an alternative to delays in outpatient appointments obtained from primary care physicians. However, the obvious reduction in the number of visits to these departments in recent weeks matched the highest peaks of contagion and deaths caused by COVID-19. A specific example is the Virgen de la Victoria University Hospital of Málaga in which, if we compare the emergency visits of the past 2 months with the same period of the previous year, we will see a reduction of about 80% between March 14 and April 25, the former being the date in which the quarantine measures came into effect (Fig. 1). The reason for said reduction could be due to the fact that the immense majority of consultations in the previous year were not genuine emergencies, which reinforces the commonly suspected but hardly ever measured idea about the overuse of available health resources in these areas by the population.

Accordingly, it is our responsibility to use this opportunity to press for health education measures aimed at raising awareness among the population about the importance of an adequate use of ophthalmological emergencies to do away once and for all with the idea of unlimited and unrestricted availability. In addition to enabling more efficient management of hospital resources, said measures would allow a regulation of the "burnt-out health professional syndrome" among our residents considering that they are the ones that bear the brunt of the massification of said services.

Conflict of interests

No conflict of interests was declared by the author.

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