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## Letter to the Editor

**Identification of deaths from coronavirus COVID-19: A challenge for clinical medicine?\***

**Identificación de fallecidos por el coronavirus COVID-19: ¿un desafío de la medicina clínica?**

Dear Editor:

The SARS-CoV-2 disease pandemic, characterised by a high level of infection, has increased the morbidity and mortality rate among the world's population, exceeding the capacity of public health services in the affected countries to control epidemiology and care for infected patients in isolated settings.

The high number of deaths caused by the virus is also affecting the capacity of autopsy or hospital morgue departments for proper corpse storage, timely cremation and delivery of bodies to relatives for proper burial in accordance with established safety protocols for funeral services.

The article *Characterisation and adverse events related to health-care in SARS-CoV-2 infected patients who died in a tertiary hospital*,<sup>1</sup> points out that response protocols for the treatment of people infected by this virus are necessary to avoid overcrowding in care centres. Moreover, according to the research, human beings are not meant to live or die alone.

To complement what is stated in the article, it is necessary that, in the process of the loss of a relative, a clinical contingency plan be drawn up, beginning with the evacuation of the corpses from the ICU to delivery to relatives, and to continue with the full identification of the corpse through photographic, video, fingerprint and dental records, among others, which will allow, with certainty, the delivery of the ashes or the body of the deceased to his/her relatives.<sup>2,3</sup>

On the other hand, there are recurrent reports of collective cremation of corpses, burial in mass graves or the mistaken delivery of the remains to the wrong relatives, which has caused a lot of uncertainty and the unnecessary prolongation of the mourning period. Improving the mechanisms for proper identification and necessary

clinical documentation by health and funeral services is therefore an outstanding challenge.<sup>4,5</sup>

Finally, allowing family members access to information regarding their loved one is an essential right and a recognition of human dignity. Therefore, communication between relatives and cremation and burial officials must be constant, in order to obtain the death certificate and to be certain that the body or ashes belong to the deceased relative. This is one of the challenges in this pandemic context.

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