Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

American Journal of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Medicine and Surgery 42 (2021) 103007

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

American Journal of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Medicine and Surgery

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/amjoto

Tracheostomy in COVID-19 patients: A matter of staff safety and mortality

Dear Editor,

we read with great interest the article by Mata-Castro et al. about the outcomes of critically ill patients with COVID-19 underwent tracheostomy [1]. The authors concluded that the delay in tracheostomy may prolonged the need of mechanical ventilation but did not affect mortality [1]. We applaud the work of the authors however we have some concerns.

First the author reported that tracheostomy was performed in intensive care unit (ICU) by an experienced team [1]. Tracheostomy is an aerosol generating procedure and staff safety during it should be guaranteed [2]. Different reports suggested modifying tracheostomy technique with the aim to add further protection for the staff [3], according to this we ask more details about the protocol used to perform tracheostomy and, particularly, how the airway was managed.

Second, mortality in critically ill tracheostomized patients is a complex matter because patient characteristics, comorbidities, reasons of ICU admission may affect it [4]. In patients with respiratory failure, ICU mortality was 50% [4]. Severe respiratory failure is the most worrisome problem and common complication of COVID-19 [5]. The authors reported an ICU mortality of 31% even in line with the current literature but much higher that the pooled mortality of 13% recently reported by a systematic review involving tracheostomized COVID-19 patients [1,6]. In this systematic review only 3 studies had a mortality more than 20% [6], we ask the authors to further discuss their data on mortality in this view.

We agree with the authors that they reported data and outcome of a unique population of patients, in this view we ask for more information that may help physicians in this pandemic.

Funding

None.

Availability of data and material (data transparency)

NA.

Code availability

NA.

Authors' contributions

MV, AM and GS collected the data, evaluated the literature, analyzed the data, wrote the manuscript and approved the final version.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

References

[1] Mata-Castro N, Sanz-López L, Pinacho-Martínez P, Varillas-Delgado D, Miró-Murillo M, Martín-Delgado MC. Tracheostomy in patients with SARS-CoV-2 reduces time on mechanical ventilation but not intensive care unit stay [published online ahead of print, 2021 Jan 4]. Am J Otolaryngol 2021;42(2):102867.

[2] Vargas M, Servillo G. Improving staff safety during tracheostomy in COVID-19 patients. Head Neck 2020;42(6):1278–9.

[3] Vargas M, Servillo G, Tessitore G, et al. Double lumen endotracheal tube for percutaneous tracheostomy. Respir Care 2014;59(11):1652–9.

[4] Vargas M, Sutherasan Y, Brunetti I, et al. Mortality and long-term quality of life after percutaneous tracheotomy in Intensive Care Unit: a prospective observational study. Minerva Anestesiol 2018;84(9):1024–31.

[5] Manganelli F, Vargas M, Iovino A, Iacovazzo C, Santoro L, Servillo G. Brainstem involvement and respiratory failure in COVID-19. Neurol Sci 2020;41(7):1663–5.

[6] Benito DA, Bestourous DE, Tong JY, Pasick LJ, Sataloff RT. Tracheotomy in COVID-19 Patients: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Weaning, Decannulation, and Survival [published online ahead of print, 2021 Jan 5]. Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/0194599820984780 [194599820984780].

Maria Vargas*, Annachiara Marra, Giuseppe Servillo
Department of Neurosciences, Reproductive and Odontostomatological Sciences, University of Naples "Federico II", via Pansini, Naples, Italy

* Corresponding author at: Department of Neurosciences, Reproductive and Odontostomatological Sciences, University of Naples "Federico II", Via Pansini, 80100 Naples, Italy.
E-mail address: vargas.maria82@gmail.com (M. Vargas).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjoto.2021.103007
Received 21 January 2021
Available online 24 March 2021