



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.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



## Letter to the Editor

## Adapting mental health care after the COVID-19 outbreak: Preliminary findings from a public general hospital in Madrid (Spain)



The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 poses a major challenge for national health systems around the globe. In these situations, healthcare centers are urged to adjust their structures to the demands of the outbreak in order to protect both the users and the workers. However, this emergency has no precedent in the recent history, and entire hospitals and clinics need further adaptations for which there is no previous evidence. This affects mental healthcare teams, which deal with the unknown psychological consequences of an overwhelming, global crisis.

Like previous pandemics (Brooks et al., 2020), the COVID-19 outbreak is compromising the mental health of exposed communities (Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, with almost one third of the world population either isolated or in quarantine, the further impact derived from this confinement shall be acknowledged too (Brooks et al., 2020). While meeting the additional pandemic-related demands (fear of contagion, end-of-life care, grief support, occupational stress, etc.), mental health teams need to follow-up their “regular” patients, who are more vulnerable to this pandemic and its emotional consequences (Yao et al., 2020). Such a task becomes extremely complex, especially in those areas more affected by the pandemic.

La Paz University Hospital is a public general hospital that provides healthcare to a catchment area of more than half a million people in Madrid (Spain), one of the regions most affected by the pandemic in the world. So far, more than 2,700 confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 have been attended in this hospital, which required a complete restructuring process. A few days after the outbreak, its mental health team managed to develop a COVID-19 intervention protocol that was based on its previous experience during the 2014 Ebola crisis in Madrid (Rodríguez-Vega et al., 2015) and on the reports that were coming from China (Xiang et al., 2020). After five weeks, we wanted to test if these specific actions, as well as the restrictions of in-person appointments, had disrupted the mental health patient's follow-ups.

So far this year, the team has seen roughly as many patients as it did in the same period of 2019 (2019: 5,733; 2020: 5,755). Similarly, we have registered almost the same follow-up appointments (2019: 30,073, 2020: 30,296). Community mental health centers have had almost a thousand more follow-ups this year (2019: 25,678; 2020: 26,790), even when in-person appointments stopped a month ago. This suggests that telephone follow-ups are compensating the reduction of in-person contacts. The general hospital, on the other hand, displays a 20% re-

duction of outpatient appointments (2019: 4,395; 2020: 3,506). However, these numbers do not include most of the pandemic-specific actions that are being implemented, such as phone calls to relatives of COVID-19 inpatients, coordination meetings, or group/individual interventions with healthcare workers.

Other European mental health teams in Italy, France, and even Spain, have also shared their experience during the outbreak. All of them agreed on the importance of teleworking, and our results suggest that it is feasible indeed. There is no doubt that this has many implications in an emergency situation like the current one, especially for those countries most affected by the pandemic. But while there is no knowing how long this outbreak will last or if there is going to be another one, teleworking probably is here to stay, at least for a few months. As many healthcare workers are saying these days, what we thought would be a 100 m sprint is actually turning into a marathon. Up to now, under the pressure of the avalanche of cases, our priority was to deliver a kind of “first aid” and to deliver it fast. But now we need to find empirical evidence that helps us put in place efficient measures for the protection of those who are the most vulnerable in this crisis.

### Funding/support

None.

### Previous presentation of the data

This manuscript represents the first presentation of these data.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

### References

- Brooks, S.K., Webster, R.K., Smith, L.E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., Rubin, G.J., 2020. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet* 395, 912–920. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8).
- Rodríguez-Vega, B., Amador, B., Ortiz-Villalobos, A., Barbero, J., Palao, A., Avedillo, C., Alcami, M., García-Benito, P., Fernández-Sánchez, A., Pérez-Sales, P., Bayón, C., Cebolla, S., Bravo Ortiz, M.F., 2015. The psychosocial response to the ebola health

- emergency: experience in Madrid, Spain. *Clin. Infect. Dis.* 60, 1866–1867. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/civ173>.
- Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., Tan, Y., Xu, L., Ho, C.S., Ho, R.C., 2020. Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors during the Initial Stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic among the General Population in China. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 17, 1729. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051729>.
- Xiang, Y.-T., Zhao, Y.-J., Liu, Z.-H., Li, X.-H., Zhao, N., Cheung, T., Ng, C.H., 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak and psychiatric hospitals in China: managing challenges through mental health service reform. *Int. J. Biol. Sci.* 16, 1741–1744. <https://doi.org/10.7150/ijbs.45072>.
- Yao, H., Chen, J.-H., Xu, Y.-F., 2020. Patients with mental health disorders in the COVID-19 epidemic. *Lancet Psychiatry* 7, e21. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30090-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30090-0).

Roberto Mediavilla<sup>a</sup>, Eduardo Fernández-Jiménez<sup>b,\*</sup>,  
Beatriz Rodríguez-Vega<sup>a,b,c</sup>, Laura Gotor-Martínez<sup>b</sup>,  
Rafael Víctor Rivelles-Sevilla<sup>b</sup>, Pilar Rojano-Capilla<sup>b</sup>,  
María-Fe Bravo-Ortiz<sup>a,b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Hospital La Paz Institute for Health Research (IdiPAZ), Madrid, Spain  
<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology and Mental Health, La Paz University Hospital, Madrid, Spain

<sup>c</sup> Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM), Madrid, Spain

E-mail address: [edufjerjim.psy@gmail.com](mailto:edufjerjim.psy@gmail.com) (E. Fernández-Jiménez).

\* Corresponding author.