

Effects of SARS-CoV- 2 pandemic on follow-up and pharmacological treatment of chronic diseases in undocumented migrants.

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BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health 2021.

Background: all over the world, the COVID-19 pandemic, not unlikely other epidemics, has hit harder people in low socioeconomic conditions. In Western countries, undocumented migrants are a growing component of this disadvantaged segment of the population. Their health conditions are frequently burdened by a number of chronic conditions, and they experience many difficulties in accessing public health services. Frequently, the only medical assistance they can get is provided by non-governmental organisations.

Methods: we studied the medical records (including pharmacological treatments) of all patients attending the outpatient clinics of Opera San Francesco (OSF; a big charity in Milano, Italy), in the first 5 months of 2020. These comprise the outbreak of the pandemic and the lockdown period. The 1914 patients (1814 undocumented migrants and 100 Italians) seen during the lockdown were compared with those seen in the same period of 2019 and with those seen in the preceding months of 2020. We especially focused on three chronic conditions: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and psychiatric disorders.

Results: the number of consultations during the first 5 months of 2020 was much smaller than that of the same period of 2019. During the lockdown, we found 4048 consultations for 1914 patients, while they were 8051 in the same period of 2019 and 5681 in the first 2 months of 2020. The quantity of medicines dispensed by OSF showed a marked decrease in the period of the study and mainly during the lockdown. The decrease in consultations and dispensation of medicines was most evident for psychiatric patients and almost not existent for patients with diabetes. Female patients suffered a more pronounced reduction.

Conclusions: Western countries need strategies to better assist the very poor during epidemics. Differences among different groups of disadvantaged persons should be taken into account when designing recovery plans.

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