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ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN COVID PANDEMIC; A BOON OR BANE ???

Anaesthesiology

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has struck at a moment when the natural world is more intertwined than ever before. It's the first pandemic of the digital era, and never before has it been possible to communicate and stay connected so swiftly during a pandemic.Though physical connectivity has hastened the disease's spread over the globe due to extensive travel, social media connectivity is a tool that, when utilised properly and judiciously, can influence people's behaviour and enhance individual's and global health.These social media portals may be used to quickly broadcast significant new information, relevant new scientific results, discuss diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up protocols, and evaluate alternative techniques globally, removing potential geographic barriers. Simultaneously, a massive volume of potentially harmful misinformation is spreading at a faster rate via social media than the disease itself. As a result, it is vital to give timely, reliable, and trustworthy information addressing critical infection control issues.

In this review, we present the most significant facts on the impact, benefits, and drawbacks of using social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic .

KEYWORDS

covid-19 pandemic, social media, telemedicne , public awareness , information sharing.

INTRODUCTION

It is a proven fact that our human body is a bundle of bacteria and viruses, some good some bad and for that matter all existence in this world is made up of bacteria, viruses and millions of micro organisms. The first of the major pandemic of the century occurred in three waves in early March 1918 during World War 1 and continued till 1919. The pandemic in India began in Bombay in June1918, with one likely route being ships transporting troops returning to Europe from the First World War . It killed around 500 million people worldwide . Spain was particularly heavily impacted by the pandemic, hence it was given the moniker Spanish flu. Also Spain was a neutral country during World War I and had a free press, so the outbreak was dubbed "Spanish flu." [1] After Spanish flu it is the covid pandemic that has severely affected the human race worldwide and has proven to be a global health crisis, leaving heavy impact on everybody's lives.In December 2019, reports of residents in China contracting viral pneumonia surfaced, it was thought to be connected to a local Wuhan seafood market .On February11,2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially named the disease "Covid 19." on 11 February 2020. Stigmatized people called it "corona " on streets..[2]

The public was alarmed by the virus's increasing infectivity and ease of dissemination and various measure to contain the spread like social distancing, lockdown ,personal hygiene, double masking etc were taken. The pandemic has equally put immense pressure on healthcare, economic and social sectors of all the countries worldwide . During the pandemic there was increased pressure on the public health professionals and governing bodies to increase awareness, knowledge and preparedness among the general public and health care staff to combat the pandemic safely and effectively. Here the main matter of concern was the method of delivery of the correct information to large masses at a short span of time which was possible with the help of social media.

Social media has always played an indispensable role in human lives. A social media platform is a web-based tool that allows people to create and share information and ideas in virtual communities. Social media platforms cover a broad range of networking sites (for example, Facebook), information-disseminating platforms (for example, YouTube), and micro-blogging services (e.g., Twitter). With the advent of covid 19 pandemic which led to norms like social distancing and limiting contact with others, social media became a very important platform for interaction. It has become an important tool for information generation, dissemination and consumption.In today's world, the media has evolved into a strong tool that influences and controls disease outcomes in a variety of ways . Because of the diversity and immensity of different media kinds, it can have both beneficial and detrimental effects.

Various ways in which the social media has affected the course of pandemic-

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Even before the pandemic, social media applications were widely employed as a critical tool for everyday human interactions and in the educational process worldwide. As a result of the pandemic, the world has been compelled to adopt online teaching using various social media applications as an important instrument in the learning process.

In order to adapt to physical distancing issues while keeping up with the medical training standards, the pandemic has pushed virtual web-based learning to the forefront of medical educational training programmes. Zoom meetings, webinars, and other interfaces were used to conduct various training programmes for health care workers (HCWs), volunteers, and medical students.Many professionals have resorted to using basic software to record their lectures and make them available to a large internet audience rather than giving live presentation at a conference.This technique also offers the added benefit of allowing anyone who couldn't watch the live broadcast to access video recordings of the lectures online. These discussions have become more lively and interactive as a result of live moderating and the possibility for a wide audience to ask questions to the experts on the spot.While webinars are not new, their widespread use during the covid times is notable, in terms of their increased use by the traditional speakers' and the relative ease with which they can be used. .[3]

Furthermore, there are various opportunities to practise evidence-based medicine with the rising corpus of writings and information on COVID 19. In order to recognise "fake news" and deliver accurate information to our patients, the medical mind naturally participates in critical analysis of published materials vs news reports.[4]

Research groups have also used social media; recruitment to existing research studies has been pushed on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, with results being published immediately.The COVID-19 intubation database12 is a great example of this, as it keeps track of all COVID-19 intubations.GENOMICC,13 REMAP-CAP,14 RECOVERY,15 ECMOcard16 and EuroELSO survey17 are among the many significant national and international studies that use social media. [3]

DISSEMINATION OF CRUCIAL INFORMATION/ INFORMATION SHARING

During unexpected pandemic outbreaks, the public requires quick and accurate information on disease signs and symptoms as well as proper guidance about the methods of prevention. Nowadays, social media is frequently viewed as a quick and efficient medium for finding, sharing, and disseminating health information to the general public.[5]

To combat the spread of covid19, social media platforms are being utilized as a tool to encourage public adherence to certain safety measures recommended by global health organizations.It aided in increasing people's favourable views towards health and their willingness to follow preventive measures. Several websites have also been created to enhance public awareness of successful ways for dealing with social and physical distancing. [6]

Similarly there was availability of wide amount of information on covid pandemic with easy accessibility to everyone. The latest guidelines and recommendations for HCWs and other health care professionals were frequently updated and easily available. International organizations like World Health Organization (WHO) , as well as various regional societies have all made information repositories available on their websites.[3] .Dedicated sections have been created to encourage the sharing of articles and information related to the pandemic.Important articles, instructional links, guidelines/ protocols, and other information is regularly shared on their social media streams, with updates as the pandemic unfolds.

Guidelines, protocols, and standardized operating procedures, which are generally retained within institutions, are being circulated at an phenomenal rate during covid, with social media serving as a valuable medium..Free and easy-to-use collaboration technologies like Google Drive, DropBox, etc complement messaging and conferencing systems like Zoom, Skype, and Whatsapp.Whatsapp, a popular social messaging software, has evolved into a strong information exchange platform . Several specific social media app groups have been formed, in which covid related data distributed promptly and sharing like this is quite beneficial.Furthermore, document writers were able to collect peer reviews from a huge number of of healthcare professionals, resulting in timely and relevant feedback that would have otherwise taken much more time and effort. .[3]

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR DISEASE TRACKING AND SURVEILLANCE.

Infodemiology (i.e., information epidemiology) refers to “the set of approaches, that investigates health data on the internet for the goal of public health studies and policies .” Infoveillance (also known as information surveillance) is a type of syndromic surveillance that uses web data to detect disease outbreaks more quickly than traditional monitoring methods. [7]

As a direct result of the covid pandemic, a novel use of social media for location monitoring and thus contact tracing has emerged. Many researchers have developed disease transmission outbreak prediction models using health-related information obtained from web. Disease outbreaks have been tracked in real time using online social networks (OSN). In the health industry, OSNs are seen as a new sort of facility and a medium for peer-to-peer communication and engagement.It can be used to gather human data in order to research user health.. Because social media provides real-time user-generated data, there is rising interest in employing OSN as a pandemic surveillance system.This feature also allows for rapid communication between health organisations and the general public during the early stages of a pandemic outbreak. [7]

TELEMEDICINE

Telemedicine is a service that provides health-related information, solves queries and monitors diseases of the patients via a secure connection, maintaining patient-doctor anonymity.The telemedicine service, however, has long been underutilized .Telemedicine was first used to provide medical assistance in rural areas or areas where care was limited, with the purpose of improving chronic illness management. [8] However, the emergence of epidemics or pandemics has pushed the deployment of increasingly new digital technology tactics, resulting in the far more frequent use of telemedicine during the various stages of infection, such as in the examples of the SARS outbreak in 2003 and, subsequently, MERSCoV in 2013. [9]

Telemedicine has become a significant part of clinical practice in the COVID 19 era. Due to the limits of avoiding physical encounters, pandemic times have modified the typical ways of practice in patient care.. .In order to combat these difficult times physicians and various hcws started using social media tools in the form of telemedicine to reach out to patients and provide timely treatment. technologies like internet and Smartphone usage have revolutionized monitoring and healthcare.

Telehealth is a present day method that is patient-centered and is equally beneficial for patients and physicians . It reduces the use of health-care assets, improves access to medical care, and lessens the threat of infectious disease transmission from person to person. Other than keeping individuals safe, such as the general public, patients, and health staff, it also permits care providers to be more widely available..As a result, this technology is appealing, effective, and cost-effective. At the onset of the epidemic, for example, people were scared of going to hospitals, so a helpline was set up to help them figure out if their symptoms required covid 19 testing. . Social media platforms were used to promote this and, as a result, keep the lockdown in place.It also aided in management of outpatients periodic visits for chronic conditions such as diabetes.,Hypertension etc all of which had been halted as a result of government imposing compulsory lockdown . Social media platforms was used to promote this and hence, maintain norms of the lockdown. It also aided in managing routine visits of outpatients for chronic conditions such as diabetes,Hypertension etc which were all delayed due to the lockdown.

Moreover, live video conferencing, a prevalent teleconsultation alternative, can help to prevent direct interaction, minimising the chance of exposure to respiratory secretions and virus transmission to doctors and other medical personnel. [10] Patients requiring counselling on covid-19, persons with heightened anxiety etc could all benefit from live video conferencing. Video consultations and phone follow-up are possible in a variety of cancer situations, like lung, endometrial, colorectal, cancers etc, in order to restrict the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak . [11] Many asymptomatic covid positive patients in this pandemic are home quarantined and they can also be taken care of by regular telephonic and video consultation.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The coronavirus disease pandemic of 2019 (COVID-19) has had a significant psychological impact all over the world.People are experiencing loneliness as a result of social isolation and quarantine, anxiety about illness unpredictability, financial losses as a result of business closures owing to lockdowns, boredom, and insomnia are few problems as a result of the pandemic.Suicides, domestic violence, and other forms of violence have also increased. A study done by xiong et al showed comparatively high rates of symptoms of anxiety , depression , post-traumatic stress disorder , psychological distress being reported in the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Spain, Italy , the US, Turkey, Nepal, and Denmark. [12]

Given the pandemic's expected long duration and the vast spectrum of psychosocial responses that can occur, increasing public awareness of its clinical symptoms is crucial .Because awareness of these psychosocial responses allows for early identification of individuals who may require additional psychiatric treatment if these responses are persistent, especially acute, prevalent across various situations, and affect daily functioning of the individual. Various mental health organisations have devised a comprehensive method to controlling the fast expanding mental disease load in order to address this situation. Various social media groups have been created to increase the awareness for same. For example, in China, online mental health surveys coupled with communication technologies enabled mental health physcians and health officials to provide safe mental health treatments online amidst the pandemic. [13] Through these social media platforms, it is vital to promote adaptive coping behaviors such as self-care, which includes getting enough sleep, spending time with family and friends, participating in leisure activities that are within government guidelines. It is also useful to empower peer and community support groups to watch out for one another in times of anxiety, loneliness, uncertainties, isolation and stigmatisation.. [14]

According to many studies ,previous disease outbreaks, such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which is comparable to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been linked to substantial psychological loads among healthcare professionals. [15] Quarantined healthcare

personnel, as well as those who worked in SARS units or had family or acquaintance afflicted with SARS, exhibited significantly higher levels of anxiety, despair, depression, terror, and post-traumatic stress than those who had no such encounter. [16] Social media platforms can be used as aid to provide required mental and emotional support to the hcw who are in the burden of increased workload and concern about their being source of infection to self and family members .Various mental health support groups are being made in Facebook and Whatsapp which can act as safe space for HCWs to express their emotions and mental health concerns

Given the need to keep a careful watch on physical distance, using technology and social media to promote responsive and enhanced connectivity could help overcome social isolation.. Promoting such prosocial behaviours may encourage more adaptive reactions during stressful times like the current pandemic, as well as prevent more instinctual and unhelpful reactions. [17]

Because the pandemic has resulted in global mental health difficulties, accurate information must be disseminated to alleviate the masses' fears, anxiety, and mental stress.Various healthcare specialists, psychiatrists, and other experts were invited to specific shows by the media hosts to instruct and counsel people on how to cope with this difficult circumstance and avoid mental strain.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The WHO, health care providers, and regulatory bodies continuously use the social media channels to address critical public health issues all across the world. [18]

Infection prevention and control (IPC) strategies such as mandatory use of face masks , covering mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing, hand cleaning with soap and water or use of hand sanitizer, maintaining social distance, and avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands have all been proposed as ways to reduce the risk of exposure**.** [10] Social media platforms are used widely in form of advertisements, teasers, short videos etc to increase public awareness about these preventive strategies.

Public awareness of infectious diseases leads to behavioural changes in the general public, resulting in partial treatment; this awareness, in particular, reduces the strain and financial burden on medical facilities..These projects are built around awareness-raising efforts that use social media platforms' massive scope, breadth of reach, and immediacy to communicate fast, effectively, and efficiently.

A model was created by Misra et al to look into the effect of social media campaigns on the prevalence of infectious diseases which proposed that, social media health campaigns drive people to change their behaviour, leading them to isolate and protect themselves from infection.According to the results of the study by Misra et al, as the spread of the social media health campaigns increases ,the number of infected people decreases . [19]

Laranjo et al[12] conducted a survey to determine the influence of social media networking site in modifying people's health behaviours. They discovered that the interventions had a positive impact on people's health behaviours, although there was a lot of variation.Researchers observed that internet data can help spread useful information to the public, as well as improve existing health surveillance systems and aid in disease prevention. [20]

The motivation of people to get vaccinated against coronavirus illness (COVID-19) is changing. Vaccine apprehension persists in minority communities. In light of these uncertainties and the need of high immunisation rates, physicians must encourage people to get immunised.This effort will be just as challenging and crucial as delivering clinical treatment to COVID-19 patients.It will necessitate thorough discussion with each patient.The greatest method to do so today is through digital media outlets. With easy installation of the Co win app and availability of the vaccine slot booking through this app and other social media platforms, the vaccine drive has become very succesful.Also continuous updates on social media makes it much easier for researchers, to track any effects of the vaccine – both positive and negative – and to have a comprehensive picture of the vaccine's impact .[21]

Limitations of social media –

Social media is a fast and structured platform for accessing, sharing and distributing health related information amongst general public . Even if information is readily available, it is not always dependable. Social media can also be used to spread false information. Despite the need of quick access to information in these critical times, poor comprehension or erroneous or fraudulent information in the form of rumours or unreliable news can cause confusion in the community, worsening the situation. Disseminating information, which can include fear tactics, discrimination, false claims, and conspiracy theories about the virus's origins,can lead to mass and panic buying and hoarding of sanitizers , facemasks and drugs like remedesivir, steroids , is all strongly linked to modern 21st century "info media" social media networks. [22] This is particularly relevant to poor and developing countries with limited resources and financial constraints

People nowadays use their phones so extensively that it may have medical consequences.Similarly, a study published in The Lancet described “WhatsAppitis,” in which a young woman developed wrist pain as a result of sending too many messages from her phone. Because almost everyone has Internet access on their cell phones and laptops, and everyone is capable of sending text messages and information, “panic” now transmits faster than “alert” when compared to Corona virus disease itself. [23]

False information can reach the public through these unregulated channels, leading to the emergence of several myths.As an example, in India, shortages and black marketing of face masks and hand sanitizer , also an increase in people's unrealistic expectations, necessitating diagnostic, pharmaceutical, or referral services.Government and health experts must embrace and plan for the use of social media, collaborate, set limitations and develop rules for its use, and most importantly, make it work for the general public.[22]

Many HCWs are concerned that social networking consumes a significant amount of their time and may harm their professional reputation by resulting in lawsuits for violations of personal and professional boundaries.[24]When it comes to research and publishing, it's easy to understand how misinformation might arise from a hasty examination of preliminary findings, which is then published with a rushed or non-existent peer-review procedure. During these pandemic periods, it was seen that there was an unsual hurry to publish articles; even the standard journals appear to be affected by this.Case reports, case series, and other similar documents have been published and circulated to large masses, with little regard for flaws and biases, and with appealing captions to attract readers on social media. [3]

To gain access to their patients, a number of hospitals, medical practitioners, and health agencies have created YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter profiles .However, doctors and others should use these pages or sites with caution, as any misinformation can cause chaos among the general public..Many health-care companies establish social media usage restrictions for their doctors and other staff to help prevent this on some level . The UK Nursing and Midwifery Council, for example, has released social media guidance as a supplement to professional guidelines that emphasise the need of using social media and social networking sites appropriately.[5]

On digital networking platforms, there is no effective way to oversee how information is being released and circulated..Only in a perfect world, it would be possible that everyone who uses social media creates and distributes knowledge in a ethical manner .This is not always the scenario, especially in times of catastrophe, such as the present pandemic . The reader is still responsible for verifying the accuracy of the material they are viewing before acting on it.

CONCLUSION

In the end, we can all agree that the Covid 19 pandemic exploded into a global health crisis that altered our perceptions of the world and our daily lives..During the pandemic, social media played an important role in advocating effective ways for assisting individuals in dealing with social and physical isolation, as well as eliminating stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and inequities. The government machinery and concerned health authorities need to educate the masses to judiciously use theses social media platforms so that they can turn out to be a boon for the society.

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