



EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Developing a framework to respond to the coronavirus disease-2019 infodemic and the key considerations

Koronavirüs hastalığı-2019 infodemisine yanıt vermek için bir çerçeve geliştirmek ve önemli noktalar

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To the Editor,

The containment of the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic should go hand-in-hand with ensuring the delivery of reliable information from the trustworthy sources to the general population, which is very essential considering the rise in the incidence and deaths attributed to the infection¹. The global estimates suggest that 25 million cases and 800000 deaths has been reported since the start of the infection, with the American, the South East Asian and the European region being the most affected². Amidst the novel nature of the disease, coupled with the alarming increase in the number of cases, worldwide distribution and high case fatality rate, it is quite obvious that there will be lots of anxiety, miscommunication and transmission of incorrect information among the people^{1,2}.

In other words, we have to accept that we are also battling an infodemic, which refers to the availability of huge amounts of information (viz. both correct and incorrect information) about the disease on various forums and settings, which eventually makes it difficult for the people to identify reliable information^{2,3}. It is very important to address to this problem as in the age of social media and technological advancement, any information reaches different parts of the world in a fraction of a second and is often propagated by the media, all of which together act as a major impediment for the effective containment of the infection³. On the other hand, it

won't be wrong to state that the circulation of incorrect information about the disease interferes with the implementation of the evidence-based strategies in any area³.

In these difficult times, it is the responsibility of the health authorities to ensure that people receive the right information in a time-bound manner to keep themselves healthy and reduce the chances of acquisition or transmission of the infection. In general, it is important to ensure that reliable information is shared with people about the cause & origin of the virus, symptoms of the disease & modes of transmission, available modes of treatment, prevention & cure, and the impact produced by different interventions in reducing the caseload of the disease^{1,3}. All these areas are the key domains wherein myths and incorrect information is spreading in the community and it becomes the responsibility of the health stakeholders to adopt various strategies (viz. technical guidance, press conference, educational videos, apps, training sessions, etc.) to respond to the problem^{2,4}.

While designing the framework of response against the disease as well as the problem of infodemic, we have to ensure that all the proposed strategies and delivered message should be built on the scientific facts. Moreover, the available knowledge should be translated into behavior-altering messages, which can be made accessible to all parts of the community^{3,4}. However, it is important to understand that we can't

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expect the people to follow whatever information we want to deliver, instead, we should also look for needs assessment and based on the obtained findings, we also communicate with them information which they want to know. In order to enhance the reach of the provided messages, we should foster liaison with various social media forums and other stakeholders, including international agencies to intensify our entire plan of providing the right information to people²⁻⁴.

The success of our public health response to the infection as well as to the infodemic will be determined by the extent of trust on the government by the general population and for that to happen the authorities should be transparent in their approach³. At the same time, the success can be enhanced by making people aware about reliable source of information (like Aarogya Setu Mobile app), multi-disciplinary efforts, adopting a mechanism to provide customized & culturally-sensitive information to different sections of people, especially the vulnerable population groups, and appealing to the community to not to spread incorrect or unreliable information about the disease unless it is verified²⁻⁵.

In conclusion, the need of the hour is to effectively contain the COVID-19 pandemic, but it cannot be done without the rapid and concerted approach to reduce the problem of infodemic, which in turn will be a big component in saving the lives of people and avoiding the spread of misinformation.

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