

Paediatric Cancer in the Philippines: The Losing Battle in the War against *COVID-19*

Amanda Christina C Dujua*

Department of Pediatrics, Section of Hematology-Oncology, University of Santo Tomas Hospital, Manila, Philippines

Description

COVID-19 has spread rampantly as a worldwide pandemic, precipitating abrupt international and national policies. In the Philippines, there was immediate implementation of community quarantine to control the viral spread and people were generally supportive of all government initiatives. Unfortunately, the overwhelming 'unknowns' of the issues pertaining to the virus has instilled public fear, essentially causing panic, resulting in unsound medical decisions and devastating consequences for children with cancer.

Since parents or guardians are afraid of bringing child with cancer to the hospital because of possible exposure to COVID-19, chemotherapy treatments are disrupted, and o -therapy monitoring is no longer followed. Furthermore, because of late diagnosis of new cancers, children tend to present with more severe disease.

Despite of the havoc that COVID-19 has caused in society, parents and guardians should be encouraged to seek consult for cancer symptoms and adhere to treatment protocols for paediatric cancer since the impact of severe disease, complications, treatment failure, and relapse are detrimental to the condition of the children, even fatal.

e Philippine government and medical community have certainly put a tremendous amount of e ort in combatting COVID-19, addressing a broad range of issues, namely testing, contact tracing, and providing medical aid / quarantine facilities. Furthermore, both the government and the medical community is still dealing with the challenges of supply and demand of hospital beds and medical supplies, including mechanical ventilators and personal protective equipment (PPEs), as well as the protection and well-being of healthcare 'frontline' workers. It is also important to note that the economic implications of community quarantine have drawn a considerable amount of attention since many businesses, including hospitals and private clinics, have experienced major nancial losses.

Unfortunately, the narrow focus on the 'war' against COVID-19 has placed the battle against paediatric cancer in the shadows. A lot of energy has been spent on the implementation of basic guidelines to limit the spread of the virus (eg social distancing, wearing of face masks, hand hygiene, etc.), but not enough emphasis is being placed on the importance of adhering to paediatric cancer treatment and management.

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*Corresponding author: Amanda Christina C Dujua, Professor, Amanda Christina C Dujua, Department of Pediatrics Section of Hematology-Oncology, University of Santo Tomas Hospital, Manila, Philippines Tel: + 63 9178142361; E-mail: amanda_md77@yahoo.com

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