Synthèse article de

« Malaria and COVID-19: Common and Different Findings »

Malaria and COVID-19 may have similar aspects and seem to have a strong potential for mutual influence. They have already caused millions of deaths, and the regions where malaria is endemic regions are at risk of suffering from the consequences of COVID-19 due to mutual side effects, such as less access to treatment for patients with malaria due to the fear of access to healthcare centers leading to worse outcomes and diagnostic delays.

Moreover, the similar and generic symptoms make it harder to achieve an immediate diagnosis. Healthcare systems and professionals will face a great challenge in case of a syndemic. Here, we present an overview of common and different findings for both diseases with possible mutual influences of one on the other, especially in countries with limited resources. The role of young health professionals, well-motivated and trained in primary care, will also be essential in countries with a high burden of malaria. In patients with symptoms such as fever, fatigue, and headache, both malaria and COVID-19 tests should always be performed. According to recent WHO recommendations , in the case of challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., supply chain disruption for RDTs, health worker absenteeism, shortage of personal protective equipment) a malaria diagnosis should be considered for all fever cases in endemic countries. On the other hand, patients with COVID-19-related symptoms that negative for malaria must undergo isolation to exclude COVID-19 until repetition of the virological sample, thus reducing the potential risk of transmission. Even though a COVID-19 outbreak may not occur in the malaria-endemic regions, the WHO has called for ministries of health and national malaria control programs to ensure that malaria control efforts are not disrupted while facing the COVID-19 response . Preparedness is the key to tackling any public health crisis, and malaria-endemic countries need to be prepared for the challenges COVID-19 could pose.

The impact of the epidemic on the health financing system as a whole is considered. A polarization of economic resources happened with Ebola, and this is also being observed with COVID-19. Therefore, in the next month, it could be possible to observe an important decrease in economic and human resources for malaria control programs, with a real risk of reducing prevention. This is turn may result in an increase in the numbers of cases, with a consequent increase in morbidity and mortality. The characteristics of COVID-19 and the previous experiences of the Ebola epidemic indicate the need for malaria-endemic countries to consider measures for preparation and prevention, focusing on not only the threat of COVID-19 but also the possible impact of other diseases, especially malaria [16]. In order to face these possible scenarios, COVID-19 preparedness and response in malaria-endemic countries should be focused on the following: 1. Local staff management, including protection, training, supervision, incentives, and rest shifts, should focus on all factors that together can help to ease the fear of contagion, diminish the anger over the death of colleagues, and contain strikes and protests; 2. Infection prevention and control measures should be applied for healthcare workers at the hospital and peripheral levels, making sure to institute appropriate low-technology measures such as washing hands with sodium hypochlorite, segregation of hospital waste, and proper application of the personal protective equipment; 3. Community engagement is crucial, as an effective communication campaign involving local leaders, indigenous associations, and media can compel the community to conform to the new behaviors (distancing, hand washing, stopping of traditional funeral rites, collaborating in contact tracing, etc.) and therefore in the end be able to retain trust in healthcare structures and operators; 4. Data management and operational research should not be neglected. It is of fundamental importance to monitor trends of routine health services use, maternal child health, TB, HIV, etc.

Finally, from a global perspective, it is necessary to increase and join efforts in order to develop an effective vaccine and it make available for everyone, as this would be the most effective preventive measure for both diseases