

Statement of the EuGMS Executive Board on the COVID-19 epidemic

Although there is no relationship between age and the probability of contracting the coronavirus (COVID-19), older adults are at much higher risk for developing serious complications from this contamination. The current analysis shows that mortality rates are about 15% in contaminated subjects over 80 years, whereas it is less than 0.5% in people < 50 years old. For this reason medical and political authorities should offer older adults, in particular the most frail among them, strict preventive measures in order to minimize the risk of contamination (see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>).

The statement of the Executive Board of the EuGMS aims to point out some additional aspects of the possible consequences of the coronavirus outbreak in older adults:

- Those at higher risk are often receiving daily support from family or carers who are potential contacts for COVID-19. It is important that affected care staff (domiciliary or care homes) are (i) educated based on best practice guidance from national health authorities or the WHO (it is updating its guidance), (ii) supported with adequate antiseptic facilities and (iii) offered sick pay if they are unwell.
- It is important to offer the optimal medical treatment to people contaminated by the COVID-19 according to the severity of the disease and the capacity of the health system in their own country. Advanced age should not by itself be a criterion for excluding patients from specialized hospital units.
- During this coronavirus outbreak, older people might experience an understandable slowing down in the discharge from acute care to rehabilitation/post-acute care units. Although reasonable (given the fact that rehabilitation/post-acute care units want to be sure the patient is not infected), this generates prolonged hospital stays with increased risk of iatrogenic consequences. We should therefore make all the necessary efforts for the patients discharged from acute care units and probably use more home care facilities for rehabilitation purposes.

The current situation shows in a dramatic way how much this major health problem concerns all of us independently of nationality, ethnicity, confession, culture and social status and makes obvious that only coordinated, common efforts can provide adequate solutions. In this respect the EuGMS is determined to join these efforts to protect the most vulnerable subjects from this epidemic.

To this purpose we will work with the national Geriatric and other Medical Societies across Europe for common actions in all domains related to the COVID-19 epidemic in older adults (prevention, treatment, care).

We also decided to create in our website a space where we can share and discuss with you about all the questions concerning the impact of the coronavirus in older people. Online soon, check our website or reach covid19taskforce@eugms.org.

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