



DECLARATION OF SUPPORT

27 April 2020

The following statements were crafted after a series of on-line meetings and discourses by the individuals representing the Philippine Rheumatology Association (PRA), Philippine College of Chest Physicians (PCCP) and Philippine Society of Nephrology (PSN). These declarations embody our support to certain issues involving the management of COVID-19 caused by the SARS COV2 virus. We acknowledge that the amount of information on this disease is rapidly evolving. This document is not all-encompassing and we anticipate that recommendations may change as knowledge on this scourge is also uncovered. This document targets the medical and academic community, hospital workers and administrators, policy makers, and researchers in the hope that a unified and multifaceted approach be taken to combat this pandemic.

We declare our support to the following statements emanating from key specialty organizations:

Prevention and Testing Among Health Care Workers (HCWs) Caring for Confirmed or Probable COVID-19 Patients

- The proper and prudent use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is still the optimal measure in reducing the transmission within the healthcare setting.
- Social distancing, frequent hand hygiene, and proper disinfection should be regularly observed and not taken for granted especially in health care settings.
- Regular screening, compliance to risk-based testing, and the prescribed quarantine period should be observed for afflicted HCWs.¹
- Among HCWs who were afflicted with this disease, strict compliance to the prescribed criteria for discharge should be observed. Clinical, laboratory findings, and imaging studies should always be correlated. Prudent use of FDA-approved IgG antibody test may assist in the decision making of clearing these HCWs for return to work. Note that more well-designed trials are still needed in the use of such test.^{1,2}

Caring for COVID-19 Patients Prior to Treatment Initiation

- Since there are still no proven or established therapy for COVID-19, proper informed consent process should be observed and obtained prior to initiation of any treatment.^{1,3,4}
- A patient's advanced directive or living will should be discussed with the patient and relatives before initiating treatment. Palliative care should be provided when appropriate.^{3,4}

Use of Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine

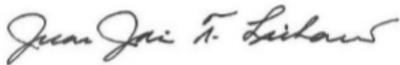
- We do not recommend the use of these agents in the context of prophylaxis.^{1,5}
- Clinical trials are underway to determine the efficacy and safety of these drugs against COVID-19, including the SOLIDARITY trial launched by the World Health Organization, with Philippines as one of the participating countries.^{6,7}
- In case these agents will be given for compassionate use, we opt for the use of chloroquine in the management of COVID-19 when feasible. Hydroxychloroquine is vital for patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) to prevent disease flares and organ damage. Supply management for this drug in SLE will be crucial.^{5,8}

Use of Agents for Cytokine Storm

- Since no agent has established efficacy and safety in this condition, proper selection of individuals for these types of interventions and close monitoring are warranted. A multidisciplinary team approach with proper appraisal to patients and other decision makers should always be conducted.
- Tocilizumab has been used as an off-label therapeutic drug in patients with COVID-19 and cytokine release syndrome. Ongoing Phase 3 clinical trials aim to determine its efficacy in COVID-19. The decision to treat with tocilizumab requires inputs from a multi-specialty disciplinary team. ^{1,9}
- There is increasing evidence to support the use of hemoperfusion as a form of treatment for cytokine release or cytokine storm syndrome in COVID-19 patients. ¹⁰

Potential Areas for Research/Further Investigations

- Potential role and timing of convalescent plasma transfusion
- Timing of tocilizumab vis-à-vis hemoperfusion or will the simultaneous use of these two agents result in greater benefit
- Effective agent for pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis
- Most effective framework or model of healthcare system in the handling of COVID-19



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