

World Journal of *Clinical Cases*

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OPINION REVIEW

- 9550 Psychiatric disorders and pain: The recurrence of a comorbidity
Vyshka G

REVIEW

- 9556 Cardiovascular disease and COVID-19, a deadly combination: A review about direct and indirect impact of a pandemic
Vidal-Perez R, Brandão M, Pazdernik M, Kresoja KP, Carpenito M, Maeda S, Casado-Arroyo R, Muscoli S, Pöss J, Fontes-Carvalho R, Vazquez-Rodriguez JM
- 9573 Molecular factors, diagnosis and management of gastrointestinal tract neuroendocrine tumors: An update
Pavlidis ET, Pavlidis TE

MINIREVIEWS

- 9588 Human-induced pluripotent stem cell-atrial-specific cardiomyocytes and atrial fibrillation
Leowattana W, Leowattana T, Leowattana P
- 9602 COVID-19 and the cardiovascular system-current knowledge and future perspectives
Chatzis DG, Magounaki K, Pantazopoulos I, Bhaskar SMM

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Case Control Study**

- 9611 PDCA nursing in improving quality management efficacy in endoscopic submucosal dissection
He YH, Wang F

Retrospective Study

- 9619 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the ocular surface
Marta A, Marques JH, Almeida D, José D, Sousa P, Barbosa I
- 9628 Anatomy and clinical application of suprascapular nerve to accessory nerve transfer
Wang JW, Zhang WB, Li F, Fang X, Yi ZQ, Xu XL, Peng X, Zhang WG
- 9641 Therapeutic effect of two methods on avulsion fracture of tibial insertion of anterior cruciate ligament
Niu HM, Wang QC, Sun RZ
- 9650 Efficacy of transcatheter arterial chemoembolization using pirarubicin-loaded microspheres combined with lobaplatin for primary liver cancer
Zhang C, Dai YH, Lian SF, Liu L, Zhao T, Wen JY

- 9657** Prognostic significance of sex determining region Y-box 2, E-cadherin, and vimentin in esophageal squamous cell carcinoma

Li C, Ma YQ

- 9670** Clinical characteristics and prognosis of orbital solitary fibrous tumor in patients from a Chinese tertiary eye hospital

Ren MY, Li J, Wu YX, Li RM, Zhang C, Liu LM, Wang JJ, Gao Y

Observational Study

- 9680** Altered heart rate variability and pulse-wave velocity after spinal cord injury

Tsou HK, Shih KC, Lin YC, Li YM, Chen HY

- 9693** Intra and extra pelvic multidisciplinary surgical approach of retroperitoneal sarcoma: Case series report

Song H, Ahn JH, Jung Y, Woo JY, Cha J, Chung YG, Lee KH

META-ANALYSIS

- 9703** Meta-analysis of gemcitabine plus nab-paclitaxel combined with targeted agents in the treatment of metastatic pancreatic cancer

Li ZH, Ma YJ, Jia ZH, Weng YY, Zhang P, Zhu SJ, Wang F

- 9714** Clinical efficacy analysis of mesenchymal stem cell therapy in patients with COVID-19: A systematic review

Cao JX, You J, Wu LH, Luo K, Wang ZX

CASE REPORT

- 9727** Treatment of gastric cancer with dermatomyositis as the initial symptom: Two case reports and review of literature

Sun XF, Gao XD, Shen KT

- 9734** Gallbladder hemorrhage—An uncommon surgical emergency: A case report

Valenti MR, Cavallaro A, Di Vita M, Zanghi A, Longo Trischitta G, Cappellani A

- 9743** Successful treatment of stage IIIB intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma using neoadjuvant therapy with the PD-1 inhibitor camrelizumab: A case report

Zhu SG, Li HB, Dai TX, Li H, Wang GY

- 9750** Myocarditis as an extraintestinal manifestation of ulcerative colitis: A case report and review of the literature

Wang YY, Shi W, Wang J, Li Y, Tian Z, Jiao Y

- 9760** Endovascular treatment of traumatic renal artery pseudoaneurysm with a Stanford type A intramural haematoma: A case report

Kim Y, Lee JY, Lee JS, Ye JB, Kim SH, Sul YH, Yoon SY, Choi JH, Choi H

- 9768** Histiocytoid giant cellulitis-like Sweet syndrome at the site of sternal aspiration: A case report and review of literature

Zhao DW, Ni J, Sun XL

- 9776** Rare giant corneal keloid presenting 26 years after trauma: A case report
Li S, Lei J, Wang YH, Xu XL, Yang K, Jie Y
- 9783** Efficacy evaluation of True Lift®, a nonsurgical facial ligament retightening injection technique: Two case reports
Huang P, Li CW, Yan YQ
- 9790** Synchronous primary duodenal papillary adenocarcinoma and gallbladder carcinoma: A case report and review of literature
Chen J, Zhu MY, Huang YH, Zhou ZC, Shen YY, Zhou Q, Fei MJ, Kong FC
- 9798** Solitary fibrous tumor of the renal pelvis: A case report
Liu M, Zheng C, Wang J, Wang JX, He L
- 9805** Gastric metastasis presenting as submucosa tumors from renal cell carcinoma: A case report
Chen WG, Shan GD, Zhu HT, Chen LH, Xu GQ
- 9814** Laparoscopic correction of hydronephrosis caused by left paraduodenal hernia in a child with cryptorchism: A case report
Wang X, Wu Y, Guan Y
- 9821** Diagnosed corrected transposition of great arteries after cesarean section: A case report
Ichii N, Kakinuma T, Fujikawa A, Takeda M, Ohta T, Kagimoto M, Kaneko A, Izumi R, Kakinuma K, Saito K, Maeyama A, Yanagida K, Takeshima N, Ohwada M
- 9828** Misdiagnosis of an elevated lesion in the esophagus: A case report
Ma XB, Ma HY, Jia XF, Wen FF, Liu CX
- 9834** Diagnostic features and therapeutic strategies for malignant paraganglioma in a patient: A case report
Gan L, Shen XD, Ren Y, Cui HX, Zhuang ZX
- 9845** Infant with reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction confirmed COVID-19 and normal chest computed tomography: A case report
Ji GH, Li B, Wu ZC, Wang W, Xiong H
- 9851** Pulmonary hypertension secondary to seronegative rheumatoid arthritis overlapping antisynthetase syndrome: A case report
Huang CY, Lu MJ, Tian JH, Liu DS, Wu CY
- 9859** Monitored anesthesia care for craniotomy in a patient with Eisenmenger syndrome: A case report
Ri HS, Jeon Y
- 9865** Emergency treatment and anesthesia management of internal carotid artery injury during neurosurgery: Four case reports
Wang J, Peng YM

- 9873** Resolution of herpes zoster-induced small bowel pseudo-obstruction by epidural nerve block: A case report
Lin YC, Cui XG, Wu LZ, Zhou DQ, Zhou Q
- 9879** Accidental venous port placement *via* the persistent left superior vena cava: Two case reports
Zhou RN, Ma XB, Wang L, Kang HF
- 9886** Application of digital positioning guide plates for the surgical extraction of multiple impacted supernumerary teeth: A case report and review of literature
Wang Z, Zhao SY, He WS, Yu F, Shi SJ, Xia XL, Luo XX, Xiao YH
- 9897** Iatrogenic aortic dissection during right transradial intervention in a patient with aberrant right subclavian artery: A case report
Ha K, Jang AY, Shin YH, Lee J, Seo J, Lee SI, Kang WC, Suh SY
- 9904** Pneumomediastinum and subcutaneous emphysema secondary to dental extraction: Two case reports
Ye LY, Wang LF, Gao JX
- 9911** Hemorrhagic shock due to submucosal esophageal hematoma along with mallory-weiss syndrome: A case report
Oba J, Usuda D, Tsuge S, Sakurai R, Kawai K, Matsubara S, Tanaka R, Suzuki M, Takano H, Shimozawa S, Hotchi Y, Usami K, Tokunaga S, Osugi I, Katou R, Ito S, Mishima K, Kondo A, Mizuno K, Takami H, Komatsu T, Nomura T, Sugita M
- 9921** Concurrent severe hepatotoxicity and agranulocytosis induced by *Polygonum multiflorum*: A case report
Shao YL, Ma CM, Wu JM, Guo FC, Zhang SC
- 9929** Transient ischemic attack after mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy: A case report
Chang CH, Kao SP, Ding DC
- 9936** Drug-induced lung injury caused by acetaminophen in a Japanese woman: A case report
Fujii M, Kenzaka T
- 9945** Familial mitochondrial encephalomyopathy, lactic acidosis, and stroke-like episode syndrome: Three case reports
Yang X, Fu LJ
- 9954** Renal pseudoaneurysm after rigid ureteroscopic lithotripsy: A case report
Li YH, Lin YS, Hsu CY, Ou YC, Tung MC

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- 9961** Role of traditional Chinese medicine in the initiative practice for health
Li Y, Li SY, Zhong Y
- 9964** Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers' families
Helou M, El Osta N, Husni R

- 9967** Transition beyond the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic: Need to address the long-term health impacts of COVID-19

Tsioutis C, Tofarides A, Spernovasilis N

ABOUT COVER

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Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers' families

Mariana Helou, Nour El Osta, Rola Husni

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic had a significant effect on the mental health, social lives, and family relationships of healthcare workers. During the pandemic, these workers had to prioritize their work over parenting, spending time with their kids or partners, planning weddings, and childbearing plans. Therefore, special recognition should be given to the families of these employees.

Key Words: Healthcare; COVID-19; Relationship; Pandemic; Emergency; Mental health

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Core Tip: Coronavirus disease 2019 effect on relationships between healthcare workers and their families is of major importance and still not adequately discussed.

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TO THE EDITOR

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had a major impact on societies, the healthcare system, and people's relationships. In particular, emergency physicians faced major challenges during the pandemic and are still facing these challenges. The first effect of the pandemic on healthcare workers was evident with the sudden cessation of social gatherings, live meetings, and learning activities, resulting in healthcare workers suffering from depression, anxiety, and insomnia[1]. Relationships with patients and their families also changed because of isolation rules and the restrictions placed on hospital visitations. The effects on the healthcare workers' lifestyles and relationships with their families have been hidden. These COVID-19 repercussions have not received the attention they deserve, and there have been a few studies on this topic.

We read with interest an observational study published in the *World Journal of Clinical Cases*[2]. We agree that COVID-19 has affected the relationships of nurses with their families. Nurses have had many stressful days and spent many extra hours at work, leaving no time for their families, children, or partners. Nurses have also reported having mental health issues and are finding it difficult to cope with this new situation[2]. A limitation of the study was that only 18 interviews were analyzed; therefore, the data were not reflective of the actual situation. However, other studies have reported the same results. One cross-sectional study on 3116 healthcare workers during COVID-19 found that it had delayed family-building plans, wedding plans, childbearing decisions, and had mental health repercussions because of the fear of getting pregnant, the risk of miscarriage, or the possibility of contracting COVID-19 while pregnant[3,4]. More than 40% of couples who had been planning to have children admitted postponing their plans because of the pandemic[4]. Therefore, the pandemic has had a major negative effect on family planning and reduced access to infertility treatments. Such delays in fertility cycles can have major psychological effects on couples trying to conceive[5]. A letter published in 2020 emphasized the childcare challenges being faced by healthcare workers who were experiencing difficulties raising their children during the pandemic. With schools and daycare centers closed and one parent in healthcare spending most time away from the home, many children were being raised by a single parent, and because 40% of healthcare workers are married to another healthcare worker, this exacerbated the issue[6]. Interviews conducted with the family members of healthcare workers revealed that family members had to do more domestic work during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and had extra family responsibilities, such as preparing food and looking after and organizing activities for their children[7].

However, it is not only healthcare workers facing emotional distress during the pandemic. The nurses' families are also suffering from stress, a fear of becoming infected, and psychiatric complaints, especially depression. A study on 208 family members of Hajar hospital employees in Iran found that 71% of participants had moderate depression[8], and another study reported family members feeling fear and anxiety[7] because they were constantly worried about the family's health and were afraid that the healthcare worker would catch COVID-19[7]. Studies have found that healthcare workers in regular direct contact with patients and their families have an increased risk of contracting COVID-19[9,10].

Although a great deal of attention has been placed on healthcare workers and their mental and social struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic, special recognition should also be given to their children, spouses, and all other family members.

FOOTNOTES

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