COVID-19 in the pediatric population and parental perceptions

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In Romania, from the beginning of the pandemic, the percentage of children infected with the novel coronavirus has remained relatively constant, around 2.5-3% of confirmed cases,^{1,2} with a zero fatality rate among children under the age of 10.² However, the measure of closing schools and kindergartens is still maintained in our country. This is, on one hand, due to the second wave of the pandemic, which led to a substantial increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, and on the other hand, the parental emotional response regarding a possible infection with SARS-CoV-2 of their child.

The care for their children, accompanied by numerous alarming news about the pandemic, has made parents have a disproportionate perception of the impact that COVID-19 can have on the pediatric population. Although adults continued to go to work, or maintained, to a certain degree, social contacts with friends or other family members, they were reluctant when it came to reopening schools and kindergartens or when their children had to carry out various educational or recreational activities.

At the same time, if we analyze the clinical experience that we have had from the onset of the pandemic in the emergency departments of pediatric hospitals, we see that the number of pediatric patients has decreased by almost half as compared to similar periods in previous years. Moreover, we have noticed an increase in the number of severe cases.

The fear of contacting the novel coronavirus in the hospital, in addition to the fear of a possible hospitalization, determined a change in the behavior and attitude that parents have towards

the child with signs and symptoms of acute illness. They preferred to seek medical advice over the phone, or unfortunately, in some situations they preferred self-medication. However, parents should be fully aware that delaying access to hospital care may be more dangerous than the risks posed by COVID-19.

In order to reduce the negative effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has on children, sustained efforts are needed from us, the adults: respecting the rules of prevention and getting vaccinated, especially because there currently is no vaccine formula approved for the pediatric population. Urgent plans must be made to reopen schools and kindergartens in areas where community transmission is not very high, as school closure has obvious negative effects on children. Furthermore, a survey should be conducted among their families and society in general, to identify the academic and economic impact of this measure.

Last but not least, we plead for the need to inform parents correctly, in order to be aware of the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in children, and the use of social media by medical staff can be an advantage for effectively communicating with them.

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