Self-medication in times of COVID-19. A perspective from Peru

Automedicación en tiempos de COVID-19. Una perspectiva desde Perú

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By September 6, 2020, 676,848 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 29,554 deaths from this cause were reported in Peru, which are figures that identify the disease as the main public health and economic problem in the country, which is ranked fifth in the number of infected subjects in the world, and first in the number of deaths per million population.¹

Collective concern has favored self-medication, with a close relationship between misinformation by the media and a desperate promotion of the use of medications without scientific basis. Currently, the Peruvian government, through the Ministry of Health, distributes the "COVID kit" for the treatment of patients with mild disease, which includes ivermectin, hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin and paracetamol.² Moreover, in different regions of Peru, ivermectin is openly manufactured and distributed without health registration for outpatient treatment.

In a total sample of 132 patients hospitalized for COVID-19 in a Peruvian hospital, 36 (33.9 %) had already self-medicated prior to admission. The most common drugs were antibiotics (28.3 %), such as azithromycin and amoxicillin, followed by ivermectin (20.7 %) and corticosteroids (17 %),³ three drugs with little or no clear scientific evidence that allows claiming that their early use has a positive result on the

course of the disease⁴ and whereby, on the contrary, adverse effects are being reported.

Of particular concern is early self-medication with corticosteroids, which are only recommended in hospitalized patients who require oxygen therapy;⁵ pre-emptive use of corticosteroids or at disease onset could prevent the body from fighting the virus and worsen disease presentation.

Paucity of information and non-compliance with health legislation can continue to encourage this practice. To reduce this tendency, it is urgent to educate the population in order to avoid self-medication and inform about the collateral damages it entails.

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