



Virtual Laryngectomy Club: A Reality

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Abstract Total laryngectomy remains an essential treatment for locally advanced laryngeal carcinoma. However, it involves lifestyle changes for the patient, such as the inability to communicate verbally, breathing or aesthetic changes, which affect their quality of life and require comprehensive rehabilitation. Speech rehabilitation is of utmost importance for these patients. Hence to provide comprehensive rehabilitation after total laryngectomy we have been running a successful laryngectomy club at our institute for the benefit of our patients. But when the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic, many of our patients couldn't make their regular followup visits. We have successfully conducted the first ever online virtual meeting for our laryngectomy club members via video conferencing service.

Keywords Total laryngectomy · Speech rehabilitation · COVID-19 · Laryngectomy club · Laryngectomy club

Background

Total laryngectomy remains an essential treatment for locally advanced laryngeal carcinoma. However, it involves lifestyle changes for the patient, such as the inability to communicate verbally, breathing and aesthetic changes, which affect their quality of life and require comprehensive rehabilitation. Speech rehabilitation is of utmost importance for these patients.

Hence to provide comprehensive rehabilitation after total laryngectomy we have been running a successful laryngectomy club with three monthly meetings, wherein the members (Laryngectomyes) interact among themselves and also with preoperative patients needing laryngectomy about the challenges of social and physical life they face in the day to day life and their solutions.

COVID-19 Global Pandemic

But when the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic [1], it brought strict border control, COVID-19 testing, contact-tracing, quarantine, isolation and physical distancing as part of a coordinated national and international effort to help contain the virus and its transmission.

Many of our patients couldn't make their regular followup visits. Inspired by the various virtual meetings being conducted for healthcare professionals during this pandemic, we contemplated on conducting a virtual meeting for our patients. With over 504 million active Internet users in India, most of the households have a smartphone with active internet connection [2, 3].

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Fig. 1 Screenshot showing zoom meet in progress

We have successfully conducted the first ever online virtual meeting (Fig. 1) for our laryngectomee club members via video conferencing service on 19th August 2020. We used Zoom (Version 5.2.1), a cloud-based video conferencing service from Zoom Video Communications, Inc. for this purpose. A total of 43 laryngectomees along with 3 preoperative patients being planned for laryngectomy have attended the virtual meeting.

The meeting started with prayer recitation by a laryngectomee using Tracheoesophageal Voice Prosthesis (TEP), then they shared their experiences about the surgery, postoperative QOL, the ongoing pandemic and how these group meetings helped them in having a positive outlook in their life. Various topics were discussed with special attention to care of stoma and taking appropriate precautions to prevent Covid-19 infection in laryngectomees and their families.

Conclusion

These online platforms have huge unexplored potential in terms of interaction with our patients, responding to their queries and addressing their problems during these challenging times. Though delivery of comprehensive cancer care is not feasible via these platforms, they can be used to allay patient fears and instill hope in these troubling times via digital contact.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethical approval This is a brief communication with the editor and the hospital Research and Ethics Committee has confirmed that no ethical approval is required.

Consent to participate Patients signed informed consent regarding publishing their data and photographs.

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