
EDITORIAL

March 11 2022, marks the second-year anniversary of this global COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Indonesia has previously extended the emergency status of COVID-19 pandemic through Presidential Decree No 24 of 2021, enacted on December 31, 2021. It stipulated the ongoing status of global COVID-19 pandemic, and that it has not ended in Indonesia. After the devastating second wave hit from Delta variant back in June 2021, the thread of another outbreak was already lurking since the end of 2021, in the form of the highly contagious and deemed-to-be vaccine evasive new variant of COVID-19, the Omicron variant. Despite many efforts by the authorities, as of February 2022, Indonesia has officially entered the third wave of this outbreak, thought to dominated by the highly contagious Omicron variant. Although reported to be associated with less morbidity and mortality rate compared to its Delta counterpart, the number of active cases keeps rising due to its highly transmissible nature. The higher number of active cases worries many experts as it will also lead to a higher absolute mortality number, despite the lower chances of mortality.

As of February 27, 2022, Indonesia holds the record in the Southeast Asia region for the highest daily number of COVID-19 related-death. As many as 229 lives were lost that day. Among them, 46% was reported to have comorbidities and 53% was of the elderly group. It is quite worrisome that mortality caused by COVID-19 during this wave is not always associated with comorbidities. Higher mortality rate is also reported amongst those unvaccinated.

Between the second and the third wave, the Government of Indonesia had managed to curtail both the active case and mortality rate, bringing down positivity rate to less than 1% for several months, with less than 10 deaths per day, and received many appraised from other countries for its success. Unfortunately, since February 11 2022, daily mortality number had risen to more than 100 deaths per day, reaching a record-breaking number in Southeast Asia 16 days later. Every life matter, and to those who succumbed to the disease, nothing could ever replace the loss. As for those who survive and living their lives through this pandemic, we are hopeful for a possibility of transitioning to the endemic era of COVID-19. Mitigation plan is currently being prepared by the authorities on transitioning into an endemic phase, a new normal era.

As we storm together through this pandemic situation, other major health issues still exist and must also be addressed. Every year, the second week of March is celebrated as the World Glaucoma Week, a global initiative of the World Glaucoma Association to raise awareness on glaucoma, focusing on glaucoma as the leading cause of preventable irreversible blindness worldwide. It is the time for the international community, fellow ophthalmologists, and key stakeholders to stimulate awareness on glaucoma and to improve the care for the patients through worldwide activities. The prevention of needless vision impairment must be the goal in raising awareness during this World Glaucoma Week. The prompt diagnosis and treatment are essential to prevent glaucoma progressivity and grave outcome of permanent blindness; therefore, the goal of this initiative is to alert people to have regular eye checks to detect glaucoma as early as possible.

The glaucoma situation in Indonesia itself is quite worrisome. According to the 1996 national data on blindness and visual impairment, 1.5 % prevalence of glaucoma nationwide was reported, putting it on the second leading cause of blindness after cataract. Latest data from the 2016 Rapid Assessment Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) survey implemented in 15 provinces across Indonesia reported 3% blindness prevalence for people above 50 years old nationwide. In the same survey, it was also reported that glaucoma was the fifth leading cause of blindness, contributing to a 1.8% prevalence and was associated with poorer quality of life compared to other cause of blindness. The number of glaucoma is expected to rise exponentially throughout the year, especially when we look at the demographic data of this nation with an estimated population of 296 million people by the year 2030. Age is among the risk factors for glaucoma, and with the rising number of elderly people aged above 50 years old, the absolute number of degenerative diseases including glaucoma will unquestionably rise. It is estimated the population of aged 50 and above will increase from 14% in 2020, to 29% in 2030, with better life expectancy from 70.1 to 72.2 years. Global estimation of glaucoma prevalence upsettingly will increase from 76 million cases in 2020, to 111.8 million cases by the year 2040.

The concerning high numbers of blindness on initial presentation for glaucoma showed the lack of awareness and glaucoma care in the community, presenting as a growing public health concern that needs better attention and effective ophthalmic care system. Not just nationwide, but also on a global scale. Hence, the birth of World Glaucoma Week that aims at raising awareness of the potential visual morbidity of glaucoma. Through a series of engaging worldwide activities, international community of ophthalmologists, eye-care providers, key stakeholders, and the general public are invited to contribute to the effort of sight preservation. In Indonesia, particularly, lack of compliance and low socioeconomical status have played a major part in the problem. Urgent attention is desperately needed, a more effective eye care system is crucial. During World Glaucoma Week, nationwide multimedia education for the general public, continuing education for the general practitioners, and knowledge update for fellow ophthalmologists are being held nationwide from Sabang to Merauke.

The buzz of World Glaucoma Week in Indonesia has started in the past of more than 10 years and it seem, there is an increase in outpatient glaucoma patient visits from 65,447 people in 2015 to 427,091 people in 2017, with 32,027 new cases in 2015 increasing to 80,548 people in 2017. Population based study conducted recently showed at least 36% percent of patients with primary open angle glaucoma and 70% of primary angle closure glaucoma initially presented with blindness. Primary angle closure glaucoma is associated with three-fold increase in blindness compared to its open angle counterpart. A study conducted in RSUPN dr Cipto Mangunkusumo from 2015-2017 also reported a higher incidence of bilateral blindness in primary angle closure glaucoma (26 vs 14% in primary open angle glaucoma), with at least 50% initially presented with an advanced stage of the disease.

Thus, in the management of glaucoma cases in Indonesia it is recommended that we be more aggressive. Still, Compliance and Adherence are difficult to trust in our society, given the uneven distribution of education, diseases that occur in the elderly, and the poverty rate which is still a problem.

As we know, primary glaucoma is a lifelong chronic disease, which has a major impact on a patient's quality of life. Many studies show that the degree of decreased quality of life correlates with the degree of visual field defect in glaucoma which directly causes limitation of

movement in daily life. Not to mention the added anxiety of going blind. Prolonged therapy even for life, the use of many drugs and must be in accordance with the rules show that the impact of glaucoma on quality of life is very real and complex.

Through the World Glaucoma Week in March, it is hoped that all ophthalmologists, health, and social workers will participate in spreading the understanding of glaucoma in the community. Case early finding is very significant to prevent blindness. In doing so annually, we are hopeful for a better glaucoma management and eye care system in Indonesia, to prevent more blindness especially among glaucoma patients.

Best regards,

Prof. Dr. dr. Widya Artini Wiyogo, SpM(K)

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