

# Compliance with Society Guidelines in COVID-19: A Survey on Members of Society of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists of Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

### Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic affected the practice of dermatologists of Nepal. The Society laid down the guidelines for safe practice in the interest of its members and patients based on the available evidence at that time. The aim of this study was to assess the compliance of members to its guidelines.

### Methods

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study carried out from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 by circulating questionnaire via Google form to dermatologists who were members of Society of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists of Nepal. The study variables included personal details of the participants and questionnaires related to guidelines. The responses of participants were collected, and descriptive analysis of the data was done.

### Results

Out of 200 members at the time of study who were sent the mail, only 90 (45%) members responded to the questionnaire. Out of all these respondents, 76 (84.4%) were following the guidelines laid down by the society. Only 43 (47.8 %) of the respondents had deferred patients of outpatient department as per the guidelines. Out of all respondents, 60 (66.7%) had attended dermatological emergencies and triage was done by 50 (55.6%) members.

### Conclusion

The study showed that most of the members who were responsive to the survey questions sent to them were compliant with the guidelines laid down by the society.

### Keywords

COVID 19 pandemic, compliance, guidelines, SODVELON

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## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic was declared by WHO on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and the cases escalated all over the world at that time.<sup>1</sup> Most of the countries went for lockdown and routine services in hospitals were affected too. The respective doctor's organization laid down their own guidelines for protection of their members for getting infection and preventing spread of disease among patients. A guideline was developed by an ad hoc committee of Society of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists of Nepal (SODVELON) and was first released on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 for management of Dermatology patients during COVID-19. The guideline was developed based on the evidence from different sources available at the time of pandemic<sup>2,3,4</sup> and was modified by local expert for practical implications.

The guidelines had several points and ranged from running outpatient department to guide for surgical procedures. The main points of the guidelines included (1) Deferring of patients in outpatient department for 3 months during peak time of COVID-19 pandemic. (2) Attending only Dermatological emergencies (3) Following protective measures in Outpatient Department when attending patients and (4) Triage of patients for COVID-19 in outpatient department. It is always interesting to see if members comply to the guidelines laid down by the society so that an assumption can be made if the guidelines are followed by its members or not.

There are many studies on compliance with the guidelines on different aspects of prevention and treatment of different diseases, however, the study on compliance with COVID-19 guideline carried out amongst dermatologists can rarely be found on literature search. To address this gap, an effort was taken by the author, to understand the compliance of guidelines by its society amongst its members. The objective of this study was to assess COVID-19 related practice amongst dermatologists of Nepal as measured against SODVELON standards at times of COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODS

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted in members of society of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and leprologists of Nepal from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. A questionnaire (<https://forms.gle/4s2qib9ToD5E8Bif6>) was developed in Google forms based on the guidelines of Society published on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Additional questions were included with defined responses options. The invitation to participate was sent via email to all 200 life members of SODVELON Nepal with every 72 hours reminders for next 2 weeks. The participants were presented with a description of the study and were informed about its voluntary nature of participation. Members were requested to enter relevant data in google forms.

The form had two parts. First part dealt with the personal details and the second part dealt with the questionnaire related to society guidelines. The personal details included type of practice, type of dermatological practice, place of practice, age of the participants and duration of practice. The questionnaire related to practice of guidelines included knowledge about the guideline published, deferring of patients our patient for 3 months, attending dermatological emergencies, following prevention practice measures of COVID 19 like social distancing, disinfection, and triaging of the patients. All these items had specific answers to be marked by the participants.

The questionnaire took 2-3 minutes to complete; a preliminary survey showed it took at least 90 seconds to complete the survey. Thus, the responses obtained within 90 s were excluded as it indicated that questions were not read carefully. To avoid repeat answers, each e-mail address could access the questionnaire only once. All the data were entered in SPSS-20 and descriptive analysis of the data was done. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Committee of Institute of Medicine {Ref no: 114(6-11) 077/078}.

## RESULTS

In total, 90 (45%) of 200 members from different parts of the country provided data on the survey

**Table 1.** Knowledge about the guidelines of SODVELON for management of patients in Nepal during COVID-19 pandemic

Knowledge status	Number	Percent
Ignorant about the guidelines	10	11.1
Knows about the guidelines of the society	73	81.1
Knows about the guidelines but ignored	6	6.7
Thought it was not useful	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

**Table 2.** Dermatologists following protective measures as per the guidelines of the society

Practice status	Number	Percent
Guideline non-abiders	11	12.2
Guidelines followers	76	84.4
Left practicing the guidelines	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0

out of which 51 (56.7%) were males and 39 (43.3%) were females. The majority (60, 66.7%) of respondents were from Kathmandu and the predominant age group was between 30 to 40 years (n=52, 57.8%).

Of these 90 respondents, 46 (51.1%) had all types of dermatological practice, 37 (41.1%) were involved only in practice of general dermatology while 7 (7.8%) were involved predominantly in aesthetic practice. The duration of practice among these respondents was less than 5 years in 42(46.7%), 5 to 10 years in 25(27.8%) and more than 10 years in 23 (25.6%) members.

Out of all these respondents, 73 (81.1%) knew that a guideline has been developed by society for management of Dermatology patients during COVID-19 pandemic (Table 1). Only 43 (47.8%) of the respondents had deferred patients of outpatient department as per the guidelines. Out of all respondents, 60 (66.7%) had attended dermatological emergencies and 76 (84.4%) were following protective measures as per the guidelines (Table 2). Triage was done only by 50 (55.6%) of Dermatologists while seeing patients.

## DISCUSSION

This study showed that out of all respondents, 73 (81.1%) knew that a guideline of the society existed for managing dermatological patients during COVID-19 pandemic. Out of all respondents, 76 (84.4%) were following protective measures as instructed in the guidelines. We can take these findings positively as the guidelines have been used by members for their protection and that society can take a lead in the subject of public importance in future.

It was seen that only 50 (55.6%) of dermatologists used to triage the patients as recommended. The concept of triage during COVID-19 was extremely important to screen suspected covid contact to prevent transmission to healthy subject when there was little knowledge regarding its transmission dynamics. This might have exposed Dermatologist to COVID-19 patients unknowingly which would have been hazardous to them. Another interesting finding of this survey was that 60 (66.7%) Dermatologists attended emergency. This fact

shows that the emergency physician should be made aware of dermatological emergencies which are a subject of neglect by physicians.

Another important fact of this study was that only 90(45%) of total Dermatologists registered in SODVELON participated in this study. The inference could be that most of them are not technology friendly or do not follow the guidelines made by society. If the profile of respondents is analyzed, it is seen that 42 (46.7%) of dermatologists were having practice of less than five years and 23(25.6%) were having practice of more than 10 years, which shows that, the greater number of practice years, they were less likely to respond to such questionnaire. It is therefore necessary to find out if this response was due to their business, because of lack of technical knowledge or a casual response. As the present world is shifting towards virtual technology, it is essential that the members of our society should be technically updated. Society should take more initiative to involve its members in its activities and make plans to reach out to them on a personal level.

Covid-19 pandemic was one of the highly infectious disease and health care workers were more at risk of acquiring the disease and deaths before the roll out of vaccination. One of the studies showed that 5% of health care worker were SARS-COV 2 positive although the study couldn't rule out nosocomial spread.<sup>5</sup> In an another study, it was seen that rate of infection in health care worker was around 1.1%.<sup>6</sup> Study from tertiary hospital in Wuhan, China, the place of origin of COVID-19, showed that infections occurred in early stage of disease outbreak, and that non-first line health care worker had higher infection rate than first line health care worker.<sup>6</sup> Because of risk of transmission of COVID-19, the dermatology world was shifting towards virtual consultation and thereby minimizing in-person consultation.<sup>7,8</sup> All these studies had motivated the Society of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists of Nepal to formulate guidelines to prevent the spread at times of COVID-19 pandemic.

There are only few studies looking at the compliance of the guidelines laid down by the dermatological societies<sup>9</sup> and no studies on compliance with COVID-19 guidelines from the respective dermatological societies. Liu et al. evaluated compliance of COVID-19 preventive



behavior of employee returning to work post COVID-19 epidemic and found that 53.7 % were highly compliant and 46.3% had low compliance to the preventive health care behavior as mandated by government.<sup>10</sup> In a study conducted by Roga et al. , the number of respondents were 98.9% and the compliance to the preventive measures was shown by 61.9% of the respondents.<sup>11</sup> The level of compliance with guideline is low in these studies as compared with ours probably because of population involved which was public as opposed to ours which included professional dermatologists. It was good to see most our members had followed the guidelines.

The major limitation of this study was that less than half of the members had responded to the questionnaire. Moreover, the participants might not have answered deliberately, or the participant's might have answered wrongly to the questions.

## CONCLUSION

The majority of the society's members who responded to the survey questions were found to be compliant with the guidelines laid down by the society. However, it seems that the response to survey questions amongst the members was poor. This shows that society should be proactive to ensure active participation of majority of its members for ensuring compliance with its guidelines.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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