

WHO's flip flops on HCQ trial bring to fore raging debate on affordable and accessible treatment for COVID-19

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The World Health Organisation (WHO) first invoking and then discontinuing hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and lopinavir/ritonavir arms of HCQ trial has brought to the fore a raging debate on affordable and accessible treatment for COVID-19.

Further to this, the DCGI's fast-track approvals for production of new drugs like remdesivir and favipiravir and vaccine candidate Covaxin to flatten the curve of COVID-19 have baffled healthcare experts and at the same time prompted them to decipher the conundrum of recommended viable therapeutic intervention which is timely and patient friendly.

One such treatment protocols which has proved to be efficacious is the HCQ+zinc+azithromycin and omega 3 fatty acids combination, experts have claimed saying that they are the preferred choice of drugs for prevention and management of COVID-19.

"HCQ has shown positive outcomes for prophylactic use in healthcare workers and policemen in Mumbai and has prevented complications like cytokine storm. Though it is evident that HCQ has proven efficacy for reducing complications but we still need to be more judicious in terms of adopting cheaper therapies," said Dr. Pradeep Gadge, medical director, Dr. Gadge's Diabetes Care Center.

However, according to a city based pulmonologist, "There is too much of confusion about combinations and too many variables among countries and demographics." What applies to India may not be applicable to the rest of the world, he argues.



LOW
TEMPERATURE
AQUEOUS
COATING.



Film coating
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Several clinical nutritionists have also recommended consuming adequate amounts of vitamin C and D. Zinc is proven to be effective at slowing the rate that similar viruses such as SARS and common cold replicate in the body.

There are also several studies underway on prophylactic use of chloroquine, especially in healthcare workers and their families. A Turkish research team in Istanbul led by Mahir Ozmen, a professor of surgery at the Istinye University, School of Medicine in Istanbul is conducting a study on the use of chloroquine in combination with zinc, vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin D. Hydroxychloroquine, they say, helps the zinc get inside the infected cells to destroy the virus and vitamins C and D support immune function.

On March 19, 2020 American President Donald Trump mentioned that there had been encouraging results among coronavirus patients administered with HCQ+azithromycin. Recently a new study proposed by Henry Ford suggests benefit of HCQ in treating COVID-19 when given in early stage.

"If WHO suspended the clinical trials on HCQ, why they have not directed physicians to not to prescribe the medicine. Though, WHO has shown doubts on the HCQ, medical practitioners have full faith on working of HCQ on COVID-19 patients. I totally understand that there are complications of HCQ like cardiac arrhythmia, gastrointestinal, vomiting and diarrhea among others but there are ways to neutralize these effects. These side effects can easily be overcome by omega 3 fatty acid and zinc. Omega 3 fatty acid is an anti-inflammatory drug. When coronavirus enters in the body it causes inflammation. Zinc inhibit RNA dependent polymerase enzyme. Azithromycin is drug of choice for respiratory infection and is also anti-inflammatory. So this combination which includes HCQ+azithromycin+zinc and omega 3 fatty acid is the best combination of treatment," argued Pharma consultant Dr Sanjay Agrawal.

Adding to this another pharmaceutical expert Anshu Yadav explains, "HCQ and azithromycin inhibit pH-dependent steps of COVID-19 replication by increasing pH in intracellular vesicles and interferes with virus particle delivery into host cells. As zinc deficiency is frequent in older adults and patients suffering from cardiovascular disease, chronic pulmonary disease or diabetes, these drugs combined with zinc supplements can prove more effective in reducing COVID-19 morbidity and mortality than chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine individually. Therefore, these anti-malarial drugs in combination with zinc should be considered for COVID-19 clinical trials."

Among all the drugs that have the potential to be repurposed for possible use to combat coronavirus, the most talked about is HCQ-a drug that is used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and is considered better than its older version chloroquine, used in the treatment of malaria.

HCQ was also one of the drugs being studied by WHO under its 'Solidarity Trail', an international clinical trial to help find an effective treatment for COVID-19. However, gradually, questions were raised and studies pointed to the adverse health impact of HCQ on coronavirus patients. Triggered by some of these apprehensions, the WHO stopped the trials. Will WHO again consider it, experts are still not sure.