

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Covid-19 Outbreak in Malaysia: Data Sharing Benefits during Pandemic

Malina Osman, Rukman Awang Hamat

Department of Medical Microbiology and Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang Selangor, Malaysia
Email: malinaosman@upm.edu.my Tel: +603-97692365

Dear Editor,

Real epidemiology data related to cases during Covid-19 pandemic is very crucial. In epidemiology, both descriptive and analytic reports on confirmed cases are essential for the purpose of modelling, infection disease management, prevention, surveillance as well as knowledge dissemination. Precise measurement of the factors that influences the course of an epidemic is necessary (1), therefore elements included in forecasted data should be based on real situations in the fields.

Based on an observation during the period of the first three months of the outbreak, there were many debates related to the approach by the Ministry of Health regarding the scope and quality of data which were released to the public. Since the first imported case of Covid-19 was reported in Malaysia, it has been a routine for the authority to update the information on daily basis. The content of information was mainly descriptive, concise, relatively superficial but adequate for public awareness in general. The Ministry has also established a website (<http://covid-19.moh.gov.my/>) to provide information on situational updates. The website however keeps on changing on a daily basis, and it provides no clues related to time series or chronological information (2).

To some medical practitioners, they perceived that the existing data in Malaysia is sparse and not helpful for them to understand the real issue during the outbreak (3). By comparing to the situation in China, there were substantial publications related to the outbreak of the new coronavirus as reported in most relevant journals. The information that was shared by China, was very helpful to assist other countries to prepare for an outbreak during that time. In Thailand, their policy on research which nurtures collaboration with universities, allows them to have their own Covid-19 vaccine (4). Till date, review of published journals have only revealed that majority of the publications on the outbreak of Covid-19 in Malaysia were only descriptive (based on information released by the Ministry of Health) together with detailed expert opinions. There is an article entitled A single mass gathering resulted in massive transmission of COVID-19 infections in Malaysia with further

international spread (5) which has triggered renewed interest in epidemiological studies. However, from epidemiological points of view, the detailed content of the said article was extremely inadequate as one of the references quoted from the Ministry of Health website (2), was no longer available.

As sharing of data during a major outbreak provides several benefits such as better deduction of new understanding, avoiding obsolete reports, initiating evidence based protocols, and potentially for vaccine production, it is timely for us from various sectors (government agencies and universities) to do research together based on the concept of data sharing.

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