

What Happened to Other Diseases?

We are in the sixth month of our struggle to prevent to further spread of Covid-19 virus. We have begun to discuss, in a late fashion, the costs we have paid and will continue to pay in many sectors, especially the economy, due to this pandemic or rather the decisions taken for coping with this pandemic. However, do you know what we discuss the least? What happened to other diseases. I want to point out now what I want to say at the end; the patients suffering diseases other than Covid-19, are paying a higher cost than Covid-19 patients and will continue to pay unless the Ministry of Health or doctors do something about this.

The State is obliged to procure and protect the public health as per article 56 of our Constitution. As per the same article, it is a human right to live in a healthy environment. The Ministry of Health has for months now, concentrated everyone to only one peril, Covid- 19. Unfortunately, so has all the doctors I know of. With the great effect of this behavior by the Ministry of Health and doctors, no one wants to go near hospitals or doctors, with the fear (this is not a wrong concern) of “contracting Covid-19”. We do not comprehend what the cost of postponed controls, diagnoses and treatments will be.

Let me give a few examples with data I have gathered. There has been a 90% decrease in mammography’s made with suspicion of breast cancer, during the 2.5-month quarantine period. When we analyze the mammography’s made after the quarantine, the onset stage cancer diagnoses have been reduced in half, whereas advanced cancer stages have tripled in number. This means that; those newly diagnosed with breast cancer were in the onset stage before the quarantine and the life expectancy of an onset stage breast cancer patient for the next 5 years is 70%. During the quarantine period, the cancer of the majority (triple the former ratio) of breast cancer patients, who did not get scans or tests due to the fear of “contracting Covid-19”, have advanced or diagnosed at an advanced stage and the life expectancy of these patients for the next 5 years is 30%. Let's assume the total number of breast cancer diagnosis in Turkey in 2020 will be the same with 2018 numbers announced by the Ministry of Health, these ratios mean over 1,500 additional breast cancer patients may die within the next 5 years that would not have normally died. This will be the price only for delay in diagnosis for breast cancer.

I want to emphasize again. We would have been able to save a majority of the onset stage breast cancer patients during the quarantine period. Now majority of them will not survive. If the Ministry of Health would make public the number of breast cancer patients who would be dead because of the quarantine precautions along with the daily Covid-19 numbers, whose credibility has fallen with the statements of few governors, I believe that this number will be more than the total of Covid -19 cases until today.

This is only one cancer type and new diagnosed patients. There has been cancer diagnosed patients who did not go to their doctors, clinics, hospitals for their treatments. Think of the rest, colonoscopies, cervical cancer tests, pregnancies getting a late ultrasound and what not, all due to the fear of Covid- 19. If the Ministry of Health is not doing anything, not even designating 1 out of every 10 public declarations, the cost of such must be paid at the elections. What about the doctors keeping quiet about all this? Unfortunately, there are those fighting for the public health as well as those looking the other way.

Don't think this is different in other countries as well. In England, the cancer diagnoses have diminished about 5.000 cases per week, during the same 2.5-month period. Those people still developed cancer, however, because they chose or felt obliged to choose to not go to the hospital, their diseases will be diagnosed later, there will be more deaths and harder treatments for the rest.

We have begun paying a high cost of decisions taken with fear or without knowing why. Those who have created the circumstances that make us feel like we have to take these decisions, should be trying to hide the reasoning behind these decisions, because we cannot dispute their decisions without the knowing the reasoning behind them.

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