

## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Coronavirus risk and potential vaccination in transplant recipients



An update on Coronavirus from Consultant Transplant Physician **Dr Paul Harden**

It has been a very difficult year for the whole population across the world due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but we know it has been especially difficult for all transplant recipients who are taking maintenance immunosuppression and as such are more vulnerable to infection. This has led to varying measures of lockdown or social / work restrictions across most countries with resultant isolation of many transplant recipients.

Unfortunately this has resulted in an increased risk of depression and mental health problems. Increasingly it is recognised that there is a significant range of risk across the more vulnerable groups such that for example current chemotherapy treated patients are at much greater risk than maintenance transplant recipients on low level immunosuppression without other co-morbidities. In addition serious Coronavirus infection is more common in males than females, Asian and Black individuals and those with multiple other diseases such as diabetes or chronic lung disease.

## Regular exercise

Many of you will be fit and well without other significant illnesses with stable transplant function more

than one year post transplant. In this setting you will be on a stable low dose of immunosuppressive drugs in most cases and are only at a slightly increased risk of Coronavirus infection and its complications. The WTGF would encourage you to maintain a good regular exercise programme including outside activities such as running, cycling, jogging, walking etc. within the allowance of the general population in your country. We believe this is perfectly safe with appropriate measures for social distancing and regular hand washing.

## Successful vaccines

Recently there has been exciting news about three successful vaccines against Coronavirus which have all shown good safety and protection against Coronavirus infection. We know that vaccination may not be quite as effective in transplant recipients due to the suppressed immune system and that live vaccines cannot be used. However there is good evidence that the annual influenza vaccination programme in many countries is effective in the transplant population and we believe that a Coronavirus vaccine will also be effective in transplant recipients. Individuals with HIV infection have a

significant suppression of the immune system but reassuringly early results from the Oxford Coronavirus vaccine trial has shown the vaccine to be effective in HIV positive participants in South Africa.

The three current vaccines are awaiting approval by National Drug Regulatory Authorities with the expectation that all three vaccines are deemed safe and effective and approved for use by early 2021. It will become clear which of these vaccines are best suited for transplant recipients and I anticipate that mass vaccination of transplant recipients will take place in the first 3-6 months of 2021. The vaccines have been shown to be remarkably safe and well tolerated and I will be recommending that our transplant recipients are vaccinated in the UK at the earliest opportunity so that hopefully we can all return to a more normal way of life within the next 6-12 months and get ready for the next WTG in 2023.

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