



Bologna, April 24th 2020

Re: Invitation to participate in a European, prospective multicenter study endorsed by UEG and ESNM on the assessment of gastrointestinal symptoms of Sars-Cov-2 infection (GI-COVID19)

Dear colleagues,

These are difficult times as we are witnessing the rapid spread of coronavirus disease throughout Europe. While many of us are directly involved in the management of patients with COVID-19 there is more that we could do, that is to devote our scientific capabilities for the benefit of our communities and people who are or will be involved in this terrible medical emergency.

A variable proportion of patients develop gastrointestinal symptoms, often as an initial or only manifestation of COVID-19. This may not surprise if one thinks that 48% of infected patients excretes SARS-Cov2 in feces and the gastrointestinal tract. Also, intestinal epithelial cells abundantly express ACE-2, the receptors that the SARS-Cov2 utilizes to gain access into the cell. These data suggest that the GI tract could be a primary site of infection and symptom development.

No definitive data are available on the real prevalence of gastrointestinal symptoms in COVID19 patients. The characterization of GI symptoms in infected patients would help to better define the clinical features of the infection, assess the predictive value of these symptoms as alarm features of the infection in COVID19 case without typical respiratory symptoms. Moreover, the long-term consequences of COVID-19 infection on the gastrointestinal tract is unknown.

We have prepared a protocol which aims at investigating the prevalence of GI symptoms during the acute phase of COVID-19 and after resolution of symptoms during a 12-month follow-up. We placed attention to limit the impact of this study on the restricted resources and time of the medical personnel as well as on the patients, taking care also to avoid a direct interaction of the physician with the patient for safety reasons.

The study is composed by two timeframes: a first one consisting in the enrollment of inpatients with and without COVID19 diagnosis and a second one for the follow-up of patients enrolled at 1, 6 and 12 months. Patient's enrollment will last 1 month from the beginning of the study for each center.

Thus, we are honored to invite you to participate to this joint spontaneous United European Gastroenterology (UEG) and European Society of Neuro-gastroenterology and Motility (ESNM) initiative.

To participate to the study, each center should:

- Enroll from 50 to 100 inpatients (50% with COVID19 and 50% without)
- Complete every mandatory field of the case report form

Please express your interest by sending an email including in the subject 'GI-COVID19' to the following address: gicovid19study@gmail.com attaching the form in appendix 1. We will then rapidly return you all the documents required for IRB approval and participation in the study.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Best regards,

Prof. Giovanni Barbara