Pre-Existing Conditions and COVID-19 Outcomes

The number of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 grows every day throughout the U.S. and across the world. As positive cases mount, so does the need for research into who is most at risk.

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that nearly 90% of Americans hospitalized with COVID-19 had one or more underlying condition. The most common conditions include high blood pressure, obesity, chronic lung disease, diabetes or heart disease.

The study used the demographics of 1,400 COVID-19 patients across 14 different states.

Dr. Stephen Hippler is the Chief Clinical Officer for OSF HealthCare. He says as these reports emerge, we need to remember that many of these diseases are so prevalent in the population, they will always appear in any patient study.

"Up to 25-30% of people have diabetes. So if people are elderly and hospitalized there's just a significant risk that they are also going to have diabetes," he explained. "Same with high blood pressure and heart disease. So you can look at a series of patients and describe what other diseases they have, but what we really need is more science to understand about those patients who don't have those diseases. How do they do? Or in patients with those diseases who aren't getting coronavirus – what is the prevalence in those as well?"

This pandemic disease is called *novel* coronavirus (COVID-19) because it's *new* to humans. Scientists, public health officials and medical professionals are learning more about the virus every day and are working as quickly as possible to find answers to key questions about the severity of the disease and its transmission.

Because of this, Dr. Hippler believes it's too early to make distinct correlations between pre-existing conditions and patient outcomes.

"We'll be so much smarter a year or two from now when we can look across thousands of patients and really analyze that in far more detail to really understand what patients are at higher risk, and who may not be at higher risk, and then couple that with the emerging science that is starting to come out in the literature about why COVID and coronavirus causes such severe disease," said Dr. Hippler.

It's also important to remember that even healthy people with no pre-existing conditions are getting infected with COVID-19. Dr. Hippler strongly encourages people to continue to be vigilant during this pandemic.

"If people don't have preexisting conditions, they can be falsely led down a path and assume they're not at risk, and we know that's not the case," he warned. "So really what we know of COVID-19 is everybody is at risk. Anybody can get severe disease and be in the ICU."

Dr. Hippler continued, "So regardless of whether you have obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or any other illness, practice social distancing, wash your hands, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. All those really important hygienic measures are important for everybody to follow, whether you have any other conditions or not."

For more information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including frequently asked questions, please visit the OSF HealthCare COVID-19 digital health hub: www.osfhealthcare.org/covid19/.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and it is not an emergency, use one of the digital care options offered by OSF. You can connect through Clare, a digital assistant available through the OSF website, or by calling the 24/7 nurse hotline at 833-OSF-KNOW (833-673-5669).