

AUA Inside Tract Podcast Transcript
Episode 103

Brazil's COVID-19 Experience with Dr. Luiz Otavio Torres

Host: The World Health Organization reported the first case of COVID-19 in Brazil on February 27th. It was also the first case of COVID-19 in South America. As of April 12th, more than 19,000 cases have been reported in Brazil. I have a very special guest on the line today all the way from Brazil, and I'm gonna have him introduce himself right now and tell me a little bit about his work.

Dr. Torres: Okay. Thank you very much for inviting me. My name is Luiz Otavio Torres. I live in the city of Belo Horizonte. I'm a urologist and I work in Belo Horizonte, in southeast of Brazil. It's a metropolitan area for around three to four million people. I'm a member of the AUA for the last 30 years, since 1990. And for the last eight to nine years, I'm the representative of Brazil at the International Member Committee of the AUA. I'm working together with the AUA for the last 10 years because during this time, I'm also the head of the Department of International Relations of the Brazilian Society of Urology. So I'm in close contact with the liaison of the AUA and all the people from the AUA.

Host: Can you tell us a little bit about what the COVID-19 situation is like in Brazil right now?

Dr. Torres: Well, yes, I just have an update. Today is the 16th March, so the update from yesterday. We have now in Brazil around 28,500 tested confirmed cases. And we have until now a little bit more than 1700 deaths. So as you said, it began in Brazil at the end of February so we're almost one month and a half of the first case. So if you see, we compare these numbers, we see that they're really not too big. But we are still ahead of the peak of the disease in our country. We are down in the curb. We didn't raise yet up in the curb. So they're expecting in Brazil the worst scenario from the end of April until mid-May that we're expecting to be the acute phase in Brazil.

In my state, that is Minas Gerais, as the second more populated state in Brazil, Minas Gerais, we have now confirmed, yesterday also, around 900 cases with 30 deaths in my state. And in my city, in Belo Horizonte, we have around 30 to 50 confirmed cases and around 9 deaths only. But again, this is the initial of scenario. We have to wait to see how it's gonna go wrong, how it's gonna be in the next two or three weeks.

What I can tell you also is that in different parts of Brazil are having different kind of attitudes to try to keep the virus. In my city, for example, since March 23rd, everything's closed. The universities, I'm giving my lectures online since then. The hospital just stopped all elective procedures, consultations, surgeries since that day. The schools, for the students, are closed from that date also. And for your information, the schools here in Brazil, they are coming back just in 1st June to do classes. Our winter vacation is in July. It's different from U.S. So we have two to three weeks of vacation in July. So they anticipated the vacation to mid-May until end of May. So they will not have vacation in July but the classes will come back for the schools in 1st, 2nd June.

The universities are still open. We have public universities. We have private universities. All of them are closed right now. But we don't know when they're coming back. Well, the commerce of parks, or the shoppings, or malls, or the cinema, arts, resorts, everything's closed at my city since May 3rd.

Host: How else did the hospitals in your region prepare for this pandemic?

Dr. Torres: I think that, as all in the world, it was like that. In the first moment, people were not believing what's gonna happen. But in fact, it wasn't...we have the little...you know, little luckier because we had the peaks of countries in Europe so we saw what's happening there and we began preparing, for example, for the urgencies in the hospital. We have two different entrances, with those with respiratory problems and those with other problems. So the entrance of the urgency were separated.

We tried to make the... We first cancelled, again, the surgeries, the elective surgeries, just only urgencies. And we tried to separate rooms from the virus and from another situations. So we tried to keep patients being operated in different parts of the surgical block, different rooms, of course. We are spreading all the PPEs, the personal protective equipment, to all the doctors and nurses. Many private companies are giving money to buy new ventilators for the hospitals. We're trying to keep most of the rooms of the intensive care units just for the virus.

In many cities, including my city, and Rio, and Sao Paulo, they are constructing hospitals just for the virus. So in my city, in the exposition area, the convention center, we are now...we have new 800 beds waiting for the peak of the virus. So we try to do... Again, we don't know exactly how this is gonna go on in my city and in Brazil, but we try to prepare the best scenario that we can do. But as in all countries in the world, the health care system, they are not prepared for a pandemic like this. So many people with disease at the same time. But, well, we

have to wait. Maybe if we have this conversation in one month, I can tell you what's happening in Brazil.

Host: Can you tell me about how the urologists at the hospitals and medical centers in your region of Brazil have been impacted by this pandemic?

Dr. Torres: Well, we have here two or three different aspects to see. One is working. So 90% of the activities are canceled. So we are not working. In Brazil, the urologists, until now, were not deployed to help in the coronavirus. So we cannot go to the hospital. We don't have the consultations. So the first impact is that we were...the habit to work 10 to 12 hours a day, and now, we are working maybe half an hour all right.

Second, we wanna go in the scientific speaking. This is the first time in my life I saw so many, huge, big congresses being canceled in urology all around the world, we can say about the AUA and many others. So the scientific side is also affected. We are having many webinars. At the end of March, we had a webinar together with the AUA and Brazilian Society of Urology. You know, we had the almost 400 people attending the online video webinar. And the Brazilian Society is having twice a week, all on Tuesdays and Thursdays night, we're having webinars in scientific field. So we're trying to move from in-person, the scientific content, to online and virtual content.

We cannot forget also a very important aspect, that is the financial aspect. Most of us, we don't have extra money. We have the money from our work. So if I can't see more patients, if I can't do my surgeries, so the income's going down and I'd have to pay everything. I'm still paying everything, at the office, for the secretaries and for everything. So it's also a very big financial impact. Of course, many of us who have some reservations of money but it's still a very big concern when you don't have income and you have to still continue paying your debts.

And [inaudible 00:10:17] if you cannot... We are urologists, physicians. We are human being so we have also the emotional field of the thing. Staying at home or going out, the least possible, home, it also have an emotional impact. So we are not different from people of the world and so we are suffering as all professionals.

Host: In your opinion, how will this pandemic impact the delivery of health care as we move forward?

Dr. Torres: Well, this is a good question. I think that... I mean, I'm working in urology for 35 years and I never saw a pandemic like this. So this is, for me, the

first time. I didn't see the other pandemic in the world. So what's changing here is that now, we can expect to have another one in 10 years. And why not? So I think that it will impact, for example, try to develop new material for good to protect physicians in hospitals and ORs. And I think that many people should come to improve our security. In fact, if physicians are not protect. We are not heroes or Superman, so we are in the same risk of anyone, and more than the people, the general population because we are closer to disease.

So I think that the health care community will be in more fear. But I think they will be more protected in the next future. And we think that the hospitals, we have to prepare also the health care systems. We have to prepare there for situations like that.

Host: Do you have any insights for colleagues in other countries in South America or perhaps around the world who are dealing with this COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr. Torres: Yes, in Latin America, I just had, some days ago, a good friend from Argentina. And it seems that their things are more calm now. They are also in isolation, and so the number of cases are diminishing. It seems they are coming down with the curve. In contrary, in Brazil, that we're going up in the curve, so it seems that things there are coming better.

By the other hand, in another country like Ecuador, things are terrible. I had a message, an email from a friend from there, that people are really dying. They're lying the bodies in streets. The government don't have the...how to take the bodies out so the people were just losing, keeping the bodies outside. So this is a very terrible scenario.

I am also in contact with my friends in U.S., in New York, and in many countries in the world. I'm also the president of the International Society for Sexual Medicine. So my executive board are from five different countries. So we are all in touch. And all these countries, the word is "social isolation." So everybody's the same way, stopping working. This is the feeling I have for, maybe, friends from around 8 to 10 countries in the world, including U.S.

Host: Dr. Torres, do you have anything else you'd like to add to the discussion?

Dr. Torres: I think that I always say that we have to see both sides of the coin. So we are really living a very bad moment. I never thought in my life to expect to see more than half of the world population in some kind of isolation. We're talking about billions of people. It's not my city. So I never thought it could be possible. But the other side of the coin is that I think that people are more keen

to help other people. I think that solidarity is emerging for all souls. I think that at the end of this world crisis, we'll be better human beings afterwards.

Host: Dr. Torres, you've been so gracious with your time today. Is there any message you would like to put out there, perhaps in your native language for your colleagues around South America or the world?

Dr. Torres: I would like to, in English, before, to say, friends, stay safe. Help people. And everything, all crisis in the world will pass.

[foreign language 00:15:26-00:15:36]

And in Espaniol, [foreign language 00:15:39-00:15:52]

We'll be together again soon all around the world. Thank you for the opportunity.