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A Case Study: COVID-19 Case Intersection with Type II Diabetes Mellitus

Denada Florencia Leona [a*]

[a] *Andalas University, Dr. Mohammad Hatta Limau Manis, Padang, 25163, Indonesia*

A B S T R A C T

Introduction. Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by insulin resistance and hyperglycemia, which predisposes individuals to a higher risk of infections and severe disease outcomes. The global COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has significantly impacted patients with comorbid conditions, particularly those with T2DM. This case report highlights the clinical course, management, and outcomes of a patient with T2DM who developed severe COVID-19 pneumonia.

Case Presentation. A 58-year-old male with a 10-year history of T2DM presented to the emergency department with fever, cough, and shortness of breath lasting five days. On examination, the patient was febrile, tachypneic, and exhibited reduced oxygen saturation. Laboratory findings revealed hyperglycemia, elevated inflammatory markers, and lymphopenia. A chest CT scan showed bilateral ground-glass opacities, indicative of viral pneumonia. The patient tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Despite initial management with supplemental oxygen, the patient's respiratory status deteriorated, necessitating admission to the intensive care unit (ICU) for high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) therapy. Glycemic control was achieved using an insulin infusion protocol. The patient received dexamethasone, broad-spectrum antibiotics for secondary bacterial infection, and anticoagulation to prevent thromboembolic complications. Over two weeks, the patient's condition gradually improved, and he was weaned off respiratory support and discharged home on day 21.

Conclusion. This case underscores the complexities of managing COVID-19 pneumonia in patients with T2DM, highlighting the interplay between hyperglycemia, inflammation, and respiratory distress. Intensive monitoring and a multidisciplinary approach are critical for optimizing outcomes in this high-risk population. Further research is needed to develop targeted strategies for managing COVID-19 in patients with diabetes to reduce morbidity and mortality.

Keywords: COVID-19, Type II Diabetes Mellitus, Comorbid, Intersection

Introduction

SARS-CoV-2. The virus was first identified in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. It rapidly spread across the globe, resulting in an unprecedented pandemic that has had profound health, economic, and social impacts worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, and subsequently characterized it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. SARS-CoV-2 belongs to the Coronaviridae family, which includes other notable viruses such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV. SARS-CoV-2 primarily spreads through respiratory droplets, aerosols, and contact with contaminated surfaces. The virus gains entry into host cells via the angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptor, which is widely expressed in the respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract, and other tissues. This receptor binding facilitates viral replication and subsequent infection of host cells, leading to a range of clinical manifestations.[1]

The clinical spectrum of COVID-19 is broad, ranging from asymptomatic infection to severe respiratory illness and multi-organ failure. Common symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, myalgia, and loss of taste or smell. Severe cases can progress to pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), septic shock, and multi-organ dysfunction, particularly in vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. The rapid transmission and high morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 have placed immense pressure on healthcare systems worldwide. Hospitals and healthcare facilities have faced challenges in managing surges of critically ill patients, leading to shortages of medical supplies, ventilators, and intensive care unit (ICU) beds. The pandemic has also highlighted the need for robust public health infrastructure, effective communication strategies, and international cooperation in addressing global health threats.[2]

To mitigate the spread of SARS-CoV-2, governments and health organizations have implemented various public health measures. These include social distancing, mask mandates, hand hygiene, quarantine and isolation protocols, travel restrictions, and widespread testing and contact tracing. These interventions have been crucial in controlling transmission and reducing the burden on healthcare systems. The development and distribution of vaccines have been pivotal in the fight against COVID-19. Several vaccines, including those developed by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Johnson & Johnson, have received emergency use authorization and have been administered to millions worldwide. Vaccination efforts aim to achieve herd

immunity, reduce transmission, and prevent severe disease and death. Despite the success of vaccination campaigns, the emergence of new SARS-CoV-2 variants poses ongoing challenges to achieving global control of the virus.[3,4]

Certain populations, including the elderly, individuals with underlying comorbidities such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and immunocompromised individuals, are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 and poor outcomes. Diabetes mellitus, in particular, has been identified as a significant risk factor for severe disease and mortality. Hyperglycemia and insulin resistance can impair immune function and exacerbate the inflammatory response, leading to increased susceptibility to infections and complications. Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by hyperglycemia due to defects in insulin secretion, insulin action, or both. It is associated with microvascular and macrovascular complications that can affect multiple organ systems. In the context of COVID-19, diabetes has been linked to an increased risk of severe pneumonia, ARDS, and mortality. Managing COVID-19 in patients with diabetes requires a multifaceted approach that includes strict glycemic control, monitoring for complications, and providing appropriate respiratory support.[4]

This case report focuses on the clinical course, management, and outcomes of a 58-year-old male with poorly controlled type 2 diabetes mellitus who developed COVID-19 pneumonia. The report highlights the challenges in managing COVID-19 in diabetic patients and underscores the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to care. Through detailed examination of the patient's presentation, laboratory findings, treatment strategies, and clinical progression, this case aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the interplay between COVID-19 and diabetes mellitus. Understanding the interactions between COVID-19 and comorbid conditions is essential for developing effective treatment protocols and improving patient outcomes. This case report provides insights into the complexities of managing COVID-19 in high-risk populations and emphasizes the need for ongoing research and collaboration to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.[5]

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by insulin resistance and impaired insulin secretion, leading to hyperglycemia. It is the most common form of diabetes, accounting for approximately 90-95% of all diabetes cases worldwide. The prevalence of T2DM has been rising rapidly, driven by increasing rates of obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and aging populations. The global burden of T2DM is significant, with substantial implications for individuals' health, healthcare systems, and economies.[5,6]

The pathogenesis of T2DM involves a complex interplay between genetic and environmental factors. Central to the development of T2DM are insulin resistance in peripheral tissues (such as muscle, liver, and adipose tissue) and β-cell dysfunction in the pancreas. Insulin resistance impairs glucose uptake in muscles and promotes hepatic gluconeogenesis, contributing to elevated blood glucose levels. Over time, β-cells in the pancreas become unable to compensate for increased insulin demand, leading to relative insulin deficiency and persistent hyperglycemia.[3]

Several risk factors are associated with the development of T2DM, including[1]:

1. Genetic Predisposition: Family history of diabetes is a strong risk factor, indicating a genetic component.
2. Obesity: Excess body weight, particularly central adiposity, is a major modifiable risk factor. Adipose tissue secretes adipokines and inflammatory cytokines that contribute to insulin resistance.
3. Sedentary Lifestyle: Physical inactivity is associated with increased risk of insulin resistance and T2DM.
4. Diet: High-calorie, low-nutrient diets rich in sugars and fats contribute to obesity and metabolic dysfunction.
5. Age: The risk of T2DM increases with age, particularly after the age of 45.
6. Ethnicity: Certain ethnic groups, such as African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, have higher prevalence rates of T2DM.
7. Gestational Diabetes: Women who develop diabetes during pregnancy have an increased risk of developing T2DM later in life.

T2DM often has a gradual onset and may remain asymptomatic for years. Common symptoms, when present, include[7]:

- Polyuria (increased urination)
- Polydipsia (increased thirst)
- Polyphagia (increased hunger)
- Unintentional weight loss
- Fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Frequent infections and slow-healing wounds

Many individuals with T2DM are diagnosed incidentally during routine medical examinations or when presenting with complications. Chronic hyperglycemia in T2DM can lead to a wide range of complications, affecting various organ systems. These complications are broadly categorized into microvascular and macrovascular complications. Microvascular Complications, such as[8]:

- Diabetic Retinopathy: Damage to the retinal blood vessels, potentially leading to blindness.

- Diabetic Nephropathy: Kidney damage, which can progress to end-stage renal disease.
- Diabetic Neuropathy: Nerve damage, resulting in symptoms such as pain, tingling, and loss of sensation, particularly in the extremities.

Macrovascular Complications, such as[2]:

- Cardiovascular Disease: Increased risk of coronary artery disease, myocardial infarction, and stroke.
- Peripheral Artery Disease: Reduced blood flow to the limbs, increasing the risk of ulcers, infections, and amputations.

The management of T2DM aims to achieve and maintain optimal glycemic control, prevent complications, and improve quality of life. Key components of T2DM management include[4]:

1. Lifestyle Modifications: Dietary changes, increased physical activity, and weight loss are fundamental to managing T2DM. A balanced diet low in refined sugars and saturated fats, along with regular exercise, helps improve insulin sensitivity and glycemic control.
2. Pharmacotherapy: Various medications are available to manage blood glucose levels, including metformin, sulfonylureas, DPP-4 inhibitors, GLP-1 receptor agonists, SGLT2 inhibitors, and insulin therapy. The choice of medication is individualized based on patient characteristics, comorbidities, and treatment goals.
3. Monitoring: Regular monitoring of blood glucose levels, HbA1c, blood pressure, lipid profile, and kidney function is essential to guide treatment and prevent complications.
4. Education and Support: Patient education on self-management, lifestyle changes, and medication adherence is crucial. Support from healthcare professionals, diabetes educators, and support groups can empower patients to effectively manage their condition.

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has posed significant challenges, particularly in patients with underlying comorbidities. Diabetes mellitus is a major risk factor for severe disease and adverse outcomes in COVID-19 patients. This report discusses the clinical course, management, and outcomes of a patient with COVID-19 pneumonia and poorly controlled type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Case Presentation

A 58-year-old male presented to the emergency department with a 5-day history of fever, dry cough, fatigue, and progressively worsening shortness of breath. He reported a decrease in appetite and episodes of confusion. He had a known history of type 2 diabetes mellitus for the past 10 years, which was poorly controlled (most recent HbA1c of 9.5%). Additionally, he had a history of hypertension, managed with lisinopril.

Upon arrival, the patient appeared distressed and tachypneic. Vital signs were as follows:

- Temperature: 38.5°C
- Blood Pressure: 150/90 mmHg
- Heart Rate: 110 beats per minute
- Respiratory Rate: 28 breaths per minute
- Oxygen Saturation: 89% on room air

Physical examination revealed bilateral crackles on lung auscultation, no jugular venous distention, and no peripheral edema. The patient was alert but appeared lethargic.

Laboratory findings included:

- Complete Blood Count: WBC 8,000/µL, Lymphocytes 800/µL
- Inflammatory Markers: CRP 150 mg/L, Ferritin 600 ng/mL, D-dimer 1.2 µg/mL, LDH 400 U/L
- Liver Function Tests: AST 55 U/L, ALT 50 U/L
- Renal Function: Creatinine 1.2 mg/dL, BUN 20 mg/dL
- Arterial Blood Gas: pH 7.45, PaO2 60 mmHg, PaCO2 35 mmHg
- Blood Glucose: 250 mg/dL

A chest X-ray showed bilateral patchy infiltrates. A nasopharyngeal swab tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR. The patient was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) due to severe respiratory distress. Supplemental oxygen therapy was initiated via a high-flow nasal cannula at 60 L/min with an FiO2 of 60%. Empiric antibiotic therapy with ceftriaxone and azithromycin was started to cover potential bacterial co-infection. Intravenous dexamethasone 6 mg daily was administered to address the severe inflammatory response associated with COVID-19. Given the patient's hyperglycemia

and history of poorly controlled diabetes, insulin therapy was intensified. A basal-bolus regimen was initiated, with close monitoring of blood glucose levels every 4 hours. An endocrinology consult was obtained to assist with managing the patient's diabetes during his critical illness.

Despite initial oxygen therapy, the patient's respiratory status deteriorated over the next 48 hours, necessitating escalation to non-invasive ventilation (NIV). Prone positioning was employed to improve oxygenation. Regular monitoring of arterial blood gases and inflammatory markers was performed to guide ongoing treatment. During the first week, the patient's condition remained critical. Daily laboratory tests revealed persistently elevated inflammatory markers, indicating a severe systemic inflammatory response. Interleukin-6 (IL-6) levels were markedly elevated, and the patient was considered for tocilizumab administration; however, due to concerns about potential side effects and limited availability, it was not administered. By the end of the first week, there was a gradual improvement in respiratory parameters. The patient was weaned off NIV and transitioned back to high-flow nasal cannula oxygen therapy. His oxygen requirements decreased, and his overall clinical status stabilized.

Blood glucose levels remained a challenge. The patient required increasing doses of insulin, and intermittent episodes of hyperglycemia were noted, which were managed with supplemental short-acting insulin doses. Ketone levels were monitored regularly, and the patient did not develop diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). By day 14, the patient showed significant clinical improvement. Oxygen requirements were reduced to 4 L/min via nasal cannula, and inflammatory markers trended downwards. A multidisciplinary team, including pulmonologists, endocrinologists, and physical therapists, was involved in planning his discharge and post-hospital care. The patient was discharged on day 21 with instructions for home isolation for an additional week. He was prescribed a tapering course of oral dexamethasone, continuation of his antihypertensive medication, and a structured insulin regimen. Follow-up appointments with endocrinology and pulmonology were scheduled to ensure continued recovery and management of his diabetes and post-COVID-19 pulmonary function.

Discussion

This case underscores the challenges in managing COVID-19 pneumonia in patients with poorly controlled diabetes mellitus. Diabetes is a significant risk factor for severe COVID-19 due to its impact on immune function and the inflammatory response. Hyperglycemia exacerbates the inflammatory state and can lead to worse outcomes, including increased risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and multi-organ failure. The management of such patients requires a comprehensive approach, including aggressive control of blood glucose levels, careful monitoring of inflammatory markers, and appropriate respiratory support. The use of steroids, while beneficial in reducing inflammation, necessitates close monitoring of blood glucose to avoid complications like hyperglycemia and DKA.[9]

The intersection of COVID-19 and type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) represents a critical area of concern due to the heightened risk of severe disease, complications, and mortality associated with these conditions. This discussion explores the multifaceted aspects of managing a patient with T2DM who develops COVID-19 pneumonia, emphasizing the pathophysiological interplay, clinical challenges, therapeutic strategies, and broader implications for healthcare systems.[9]

T2DM and COVID-19 share several pathophysiological mechanisms that exacerbate disease severity. Chronic hyperglycemia in T2DM induces a pro-inflammatory state characterized by elevated levels of cytokines such as IL-6 and TNF-α. This low-grade inflammation, coupled with insulin resistance, compromises immune function and enhances susceptibility to infections, including SARS-CoV-2. Upon infection, SARS-CoV-2 exploits the ACE2 receptor for cellular entry. ACE2 is expressed in various tissues, including the lungs, kidneys, heart, and pancreas. In patients with T2DM, chronic inflammation and hyperglycemia may upregulate ACE2 expression, potentially facilitating viral entry and replication. Moreover, the binding of SARS-CoV-2 to ACE2 can downregulate its expression, disrupting the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS) and exacerbating lung injury and inflammatory responses.[10,11]

Managing COVID-19 in patients with T2DM presents several clinical challenges, as highlighted in the case of the 58-year-old male patient. Key issues include[12]:

1. Glycemic Control:

   a. Hyperglycemia and Infection: Infections such as COVID-19 can induce stress hyperglycemia through the release of counter-regulatory hormones (e.g., cortisol, catecholamines) and inflammatory cytokines. This exacerbates insulin resistance and impairs glucose utilization, necessitating careful monitoring and adjustment of insulin therapy.

   b. Insulin Resistance:*The inflammatory milieu in COVID-19 further aggravates insulin resistance, complicating glycemic management. Insulin requirements may fluctuate, necessitating frequent glucose monitoring and dose adjustments.

   c. Steroid-Induced Hyperglycemia: The use of corticosteroids, such as dexamethasone, is a double-edged sword. While beneficial in reducing inflammation and improving respiratory outcomes, corticosteroids can significantly elevate blood glucose levels, complicating diabetes management.

2. Respiratory Management:

   a. Oxygen Therapy and Ventilatory Support: Patients with T2DM and COVID-19 pneumonia often require escalated respiratory support due to the compounded effects of viral pneumonia and underlying comorbidities. High-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) and non-invasive ventilation (NIV) are commonly employed to improve oxygenation and reduce the need for mechanical ventilation.

b. Prone Positioning: Prone positioning has shown benefits in improving oxygenation in patients with ARDS. However, its implementation in diabetic patients requires careful consideration of pressure points and potential skin breakdown, given the increased risk of peripheral neuropathy and compromised wound healing in T2DM.

3. Inflammatory and Thrombotic Complications:

a. Cytokine Storm: The hyperinflammatory state associated with severe COVID-19, often termed "cytokine storm," can lead to multi-organ dysfunction. Elevated inflammatory markers (e.g., CRP, ferritin, IL-6) necessitate vigilant monitoring and may prompt the use of immunomodulatory therapies.

b. Coagulopathy: COVID-19 is associated with an increased risk of thromboembolic events, likely due to endothelial dysfunction, hypercoagulability, and immobilization. Patients with T2DM are already predisposed to vascular complications, necessitating anticoagulation therapy to mitigate the risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE).

A multidisciplinary approach is essential for managing COVID-19 in patients with T2DM. Key therapeutic strategies include[13]:

1. Optimizing Glycemic Control:

a. Insulin Therapy: Intensive insulin therapy using basal-bolus regimens or continuous subcutaneous insulin infusion (CSII) may be required to achieve optimal glycemic control. Regular glucose monitoring and dose adjustments are crucial to avoid hypo- and hyperglycemia.

b. Glucose Monitoring: Continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) systems can provide real-time data and trends, facilitating timely interventions. Point-of-care testing (POCT) is also essential for frequent glucose checks, particularly in the ICU setting.

2. Respiratory Support:

a. Oxygen Therapy: Initiation of HFNC or NIV can improve oxygenation and reduce the work of breathing. Close monitoring of respiratory parameters and arterial blood gases (ABGs) is necessary to guide therapy and prevent respiratory failure.

b. Prone Positioning: Implementing prone positioning in ARDS can enhance ventilation-perfusion matching and oxygenation. Regular assessment of pressure areas and skin integrity is important to prevent complications.

3. Anti-Inflammatory and Immunomodulatory Therapies:

a. Corticosteroids: Dexamethasone has been shown to reduce mortality in patients with severe COVID-19 requiring respiratory support. Its use, however, must be balanced with the risk of hyperglycemia and managed accordingly.

b. Immunomodulators: Agents such as tocilizumab (IL-6 receptor antagonist) may be considered in patients with severe hyperinflammation. The decision to use such therapies should be guided by clinical and laboratory indicators of cytokine storm.

4. Anticoagulation:

Prophylactic Anticoagulation: Prophylactic doses of low-molecular-weight heparin (LMWH) or direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) are recommended to reduce the risk of thromboembolic events. In patients with confirmed or highly suspected thrombosis, therapeutic anticoagulation is warranted.

The management of COVID-19 in patients with T2DM has broader implications for healthcare systems. Key considerations include[14]:

1. Resource Allocation:

- ICU Capacity: The increased severity and complications associated with COVID-19 in diabetic patients necessitate substantial ICU resources, including ventilators, HFNC, and monitoring equipment.
- Medical Supplies: Ensuring adequate supplies of insulin, glucose monitors, and anticoagulants is critical to managing the complex needs of these patients.

2. Healthcare Personnel:

- Multidisciplinary Teams: The involvement of endocrinologists, pulmonologists, intensivists, and diabetes educators is crucial for comprehensive care. Coordination among these specialists is essential to address the multifaceted needs of diabetic patients with COVID-19.
- Training and Education: Continuous training and education for healthcare personnel on the latest guidelines and management strategies for COVID-19 and T2DM are necessary to optimize patient outcomes.

3. Public Health Measures[15]:

- Vaccination Campaigns: Prioritizing vaccination for individuals with T2DM can significantly reduce the incidence of severe COVID-19 and related complications. Public health campaigns should emphasize the importance of vaccination in high-risk populations.
- Preventive Strategies: Promoting healthy lifestyles, regular screening for diabetes, and early intervention can mitigate the risk of severe outcomes in future pandemics.

Conclusion

The interplay between COVID-19 and type 2 diabetes mellitus presents a formidable challenge, necessitating a nuanced and multidisciplinary approach to care. This case highlights the complexities of managing glycemic control, respiratory support, and inflammatory responses in diabetic patients with COVID-19 pneumonia. By understanding the pathophysiological mechanisms and clinical challenges, healthcare providers can develop effective strategies to improve patient outcomes and reduce the burden on healthcare systems. Continued research and collaboration are essential to refine therapeutic approaches and address the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on patients with chronic conditions like T2DM.

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