

Preface

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This special issue of our journal "Journal of the Association of Physicians of India" is dedicated to exploring the multifaceted nature of cough, a common yet complex symptom with significant implications for public health. The articles featured in this issue provide a comprehensive examination of cough in various populations and its epidemiology, highlighting the challenges and complexities associated with its management, particularly in the context of acute respiratory conditions, evolving treatment patterns, and the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cough, a protective reflex associated with respiratory conditions, affects 5–10% of the Indian population.^{1–3} Though cough is one of the most common symptoms patients have, its reported prevalence is very low in India. Acute cough, which lasts between 3 and 8 weeks, is often self-limiting but contributes to 50% of hospitalizations, highlighting its substantial burden on healthcare.⁴ The first study in this issue explores the prevalence of cough in Indian adults and the elderly, focusing on its association with respiratory tract infections (RTIs), asthma, and other conditions. The study underscores the importance of categorizing cough as productive, nonproductive, or unspecified for more targeted management, especially in different age groups.

Building on this epidemiological data, another study investigated cough treatment practices in India. Cough is typically

managed symptomatically with fixed-dose combinations (FDCs) and antibiotics.⁵ However, the study raises concerns about the widespread use of irrational formulations and antibiotics, which can contribute to antibiotic resistance. This article calls for standardized guidelines to ensure rational prescribing practices, promoting more effective and appropriate treatments for acute cough. Similar concerns are highlighted earlier in the Association of Physicians of India recommendations as well.⁶

Furthermore, the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cough prevalence and types was studied. The research reveals that during and after the pandemic, there was an increase in nonproductive and unspecified coughs, reflecting the lasting respiratory consequences of COVID-19. This highlights the need for ongoing surveillance and tailored interventions to manage cough in the postpandemic era.

The publications included in this issue focus on the prevalence, treatment patterns, and post-COVID-19 effects of cough. They provide critical data for internal medicine physicians. Together, they emphasize the importance of more nuanced and evidence-based management strategies. The findings advocate for rational prescribing practices, particularly in reducing the overuse of antibiotics, and call for better documentation and tailored treatment approaches. This issue ultimately aims to enhance clinical

outcomes by addressing the complexities of cough management and adapting treatment strategies to the evolving healthcare landscape.

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