

Antimicrobial resistance in Malawi: generating (qualitative) evidence to inform policy and programming

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Global MARIP Meeting, Accra
5-6 March 2018

Introduction

- The Malawi Ministry of Health has just developed the Health Sector Strategic Plan (HSSP) 2017-2022.
- The development of this Plan was informed by a number of global initiatives such as the SDGs, the Global Action Plan for AMR and others.
- The HSSP has incorporated AMR as one of the areas of emphasis.
- Malawi has drafted a National Action Plan for AMR and is yet to develop a national policy on AMRs.
- While microbial resistance has been recognized as a problem in Malawi for sometime, it is only now that the MoH and stakeholders have started paying attention and a coordinating office has since been established in Malawi.

Introduction

- The draft AMR National Action Plan acknowledges the need for evidence in order to inform the development of the National Policy on AMR as well as for purposes of programming.
- One of the key objectives of the National Action Plan is to generate evidence through surveillance and research.
- One of the key activities is to develop a National Research Agenda for AMRs in Malawi.

What studies do we need?

- The National Action Plan on AMR does not address resistance in tuberculosis and HIV because there are structures which deal with issues around resistance.
- Lessons learnt: there will be a need to explore how developing countries such as Malawi have successfully addressed issues of resistance for some diseases? What are the key lessons we can learn from some of the successful programmes which can be used to deal with resistance in other diseases?
- One comprehensive study explored the extensive use of rifampicin in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections in southern Malawi: **Bruun, B. *Service of the engine: Pharmaceuticals, moralities and sex in a Malawian Village.*** Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2002. 96 pp *Medische Antropologie*, Vol 18(1): 275-278

What studies can we do?

- There are some studies which have been conducted in developing countries which have explored the health seeking behavior of people suffering from various diseases including the use and misuse of antimicrobials.
 - The social lives of medicines – Reynolds-Whyte, van der Geest & Hardon (2002).
 - The Context of Medicines in Developing Countries: Studies in Pharmaceutical Anthropology – van der Geest and Reynolds-Whyte (1988)
- For a country like Malawi which is just embarking on responding to the problem of AMR, there is an urgent need to conduct a comprehensive review of literature on (mis)use of antimicrobials in all sectors which can inform the development of the national AMR policy as well as programming.

What research needs to be done?

- In addition to surveillance and conducting clinical studies, there is urgent need for countries such as Malawi to conduct comprehensive ethnographic studies in order to better understand the health seeking behaviours including the (mis)use of antimicrobials in the country.
- What are the individual and community level factors which promote the (mis)use of antimicrobials (looking at the users' and dispensers points of views)?
- What leads to poor implementation of policies and laws against misuse?
- What interventions should be implemented at all levels of the health care system (community, health facility, districts and national level) in order to promote rational use of antimicrobials.

Development of interventions, piloting and scaling-up

- What interventions have worked in other countries?
- Based on the results of the qualitative studies, work with communities (including local shops which sell antimicrobials, community health workers and health facilities) to design interventions which will be effective in the promotion of low cost interventions.
- Pilot the interventions, evaluate and scale-up.