



Changing Trend in the Availability of Key Essential Medicines for Children in a Resource-Limited Country

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To the Editor: Essential medicines are expected to be available within the context of functioning health systems at all times in adequate amounts in appropriate dosage-forms [1]. However, scores of essential medicines are still unavailable in suitable pediatric dosage-forms in many resource-limited countries [2, 3]. This national survey assessed the availability of 25 key essential medicines for children in Sri Lanka in 2017/2018 and compared the findings with that of our 2009 National survey [4].

In both surveys, we followed the WHO and Health Action International medicine price methodology [5]. Data were collected from a representative sample of 40 Public Hospitals-Outpatients Department (PH-OPD), 40 private and 8 Rajya Osusala (ROS) pharmacies. ROS is the retail outlet of the State Procurement Agency and located in major towns. Sample was selected from 8 provinces using a multistage-clustered approach to represent different levels of public hospitals. Details about sample selection, selection of survey medicines, data collection and data analysis are described in our previous publication [4].

Mean percent availability (MPA) has improved in PH-OPD pharmacies from 52 in 2009 to 68.1% in 2017 whereas it has dropped from 80 to 65.4% in private and 88 to 80% in ROS pharmacies. Improvement in the MPAs was seen in all 3-

levels of PHs (Teaching, District, Primary). Notable improvements were seen in the availability of anti-infectives, inhaled bronchodilators, oral rehydration salt and syrups of paracetamol, domperidone, ibuprofen and chlorphenamine in PH-OPD pharmacies whereas availability of most of them has declined in Private Pharmacies (PPs): Percentage of PH-OPD pharmacies which had syrups of amoxicillin, erythromycin, co-amoxiclav, paracetamol and carbamazepine and salbutamol inhaler has increased to 90, 80, 60, 95, 37.5 and 77.5% in 2017/18 from 45, 52.5, 12.5, 65, 0 and 37.5% respectively in 2009. However, percentage of PPs which had these medicines in 2017/18 was lower than that of 2009 except for paracetamol. Availability in ROS pharmacies remained good.

Availability of key essential medicines for children though improved in PH-OPD pharmacies, has room for further enhancement. This improvement reflects the changes in medicines regulation and supply in Sri Lanka. The declining trend in PPs needs to be investigated.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethics Approval The study was exempted from ethics review by the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo (EC-17-027).

Conflict of Interest None.

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