



LETTER TO EDITOR

Rise of Blood Borne Infections in Pakistan; Is It a Call for Action?

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DEAR EDITOR

Health care workers often suffer from occupational hazards including needle stick injuries that put workers at the risk of transmission of about 30 pathogens, including hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The prevalence of HBV in health care workers has been reported to be 2.18% (1).

This letter focuses on the various factors in the health sectors of developing countries that have caused increased prevalence of HBV, HCV and HIV among the health care workers.

Among the health care workers, the lack of precautions in needle handling and defective or absence of screening and vaccination protocols within health employees have been identified as the two most important risk factors for needle stick injuries (2).

According to the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, preoccupation screening and vaccination, and the administration of the vaccine against HBV are required for all healthcare workers. This is, however, not followed strictly in the developing countries (3). Consequently, for instance, Pakistan faces a very high rate of needle stick injuries each year; most of which remain unreported (1).

Nurses are at a greater risk of transmission via needle stick injuries as compared to others. In this regard, a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan concluded that most nurses lack the basic knowledge regarding health risks associated with needlestick injuries and the importance of post exposure prophylaxis (4).

Recently, the government of Pakistan conducted an HIV screening campaign in one of the districts of Sindh Province. It was revealed that nearly 400 out of 1548 screened individuals were seropositive for HIV. With 71.9% of the seropositive individuals being children, these figures call for rapid assessment and implementation of guidelines during health care practices to ensure

reduce risk of transmission of these pathogens (5). Although HIV and HBV are preventable diseases, the lack of knowledge, high cost of screening tests, and limited funding by the government towards the occupational expenses of workers increases the importance of needle administration protocols in health care settings of developing countries.

In conclusion, special preventative measures should be undertaken to minimize transmission risks of HBV, HCV and HIV in health care workers. These measures may include educating health care workers about the routes of transmission of HBV, HCV and HIV; improving vaccination coverage; educating high-risk workers on appropriate postexposure prophylaxis practices; mandate the practice of hand washing; encourage the use of personal protective equipment, and ensuring proper disposal of wastes.

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