
EDITORIAL

Universal Health Coverage and the Crucial Role of Pharmacists

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Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is based on all health-related sustainable development goals and has been adopted in a number of countries while others have plans to ensure that it is realized. UHC is geared towards ensuring that people have access to the use of curative, preventive, rehabilitative, as well as palliative medical services that are of superior quality and are effective without experiencing financial constraints.

World Health Organization Resolution of 1998 recognized health as a basic human right. This resolution is echoed in Chapter IV of the Constitution of Kenya which stipulates that every person is entitled to the highest attainable standard of health care services. In line with the constitution, UHC is envisaged in the Kenya Vision 2030 under the Social Pillar which aims at improving the quality of life for all the citizens via various programs in the health sector. This pillar seeks provision of affordable, equitable and quality healthcare to all Kenyans. The realization of UHC will go a long way in ensuring improved health and protecting citizens whose financial status is compromised.

The major objectives encompassing UHC include: ensuring that there is equity in access to health services, provision of quality health services and protecting people against the financial risk associated with health services. The above objectives of UHC are tailored towards ensuring that the health condition of citizens in any country is improved. The realization of these objectives is at the hands of different stakeholders including the government, insurance companies, non-governmental institutions as well as donors.

Medicines present a major challenge for UHC. In developing countries, pharmaceuticals consume 25-65% of both public and private spending on health care. According to data claims by Jubilee Insurance, pharmaceuticals in health sector take up to 40% of health expenditure in Kenya. Such statistics show the great role that pharmacists have in the health sector ranging from their involvement in manufacturing, procurement, distribution, and dispensing to the patients in various health facilities. In addition, Pharmacists are the custodians of knowledge in areas of drugs, supplements, medical devices among others. This autonomous expertise is required in hospital pharmacy, community pharmacy, regulatory control and drug management, pharmaceutical industry, research, training of other health workers and academia. The main objective is to ensure optimal drug therapy where pharmacists play a vital role across all sectors from preparation, control and

supply of pharmaceuticals (and non-pharmaceuticals) as well as providing information to prescribers and patients on these products.

The administrative roles of pharmacists include formulation of health and drug policies regarding selection, procurement as well as distribution of drugs. They provide drug-related information during the making of formularies and other guidelines in hospitals for cost-effective management of diseases. In hospital settings, the role of pharmacists is further amplified where they offer pharmaceutical care to patients by influencing drug selection and best patient drug regimens, monitoring therapeutic response and patient compliance, as well as recognize and report adverse drug reactions (ADRs). Moreover, they are at the center of drug procurement ensuring supply of high quality and cost-effective products. As members of Drugs and Therapeutic Committees in hospitals, pharmacists are key policy-makers ensuring rational selection and use of drugs and adherence to hospital formulary by prescribers. Formularies in hospitals are developed in an attempt to lower costs of healthcare to patients.

Community pharmacists are usually the first point of contact by patients before visiting a clinic or hospital. They are responsible for being primary healthcare units. In addition to their normal role of processing prescriptions and management of minor ailments; community pharmacists' care for patients by providing drug related information, counseling them on medication use and monitoring drug utilization. Moreover they participate in health promotion, administers vaccination and while some offer domiciliary services like for patients with Parkinson's disease.

Research is also carried out by pharmacists in order to introduce new drugs or improvement on existing ones in order to make them more effective in their use in treatment of different diseases. Lastly, pharmacists are important in the field of pharmacovigilance which entails assessment, detection, and preventions of ADRs and other post-marketing drug related problems.

It is clear that pharmacists form a key part in the realization of UHC. It is imperative that pharmacists are available in all hospitals, furthermore they are required for the strengthening of the regulation of pharmacy practice. In order to make stronger systems, we must engage in pursuing a higher academic level by introducing Pharm D in our mainstream curriculum. A more thorough curriculum