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First word

Non-infectious respiratory disease: a neglected epidemic in Africa

As Africa struggles to improve its social and economic condition, health remains a key pillar in achieving this goal. In Africa, we have traditionally concentrated on infectious disease which contributes to the region's high mortality. Out of the 22 high-burden countries that contribute 80% of the tuberculosis load in the world, 13 are from Africa, with a fatality rate of 32%, compared with an average of 23%. TB/HIV co-infection is 32% – four times the world average. Treatment success using DOTs ranges from 18% in Angola to 92% in Mauritius, although this trend has lately been improving with a few countries meeting some of the millennium targets.

Over 18% of all deaths in under-5s are due to pneumonia, made worse by the high prevalence of malnutrition in this age group. This high burden of morbidity and mortality of infectious disease has led to a neglect of non-infectious respiratory diseases in the continent.

The prevalence of COPD in Africa is estimated to be 0.34%. The symptoms of dyspnoea, cough, or sputum production are encountered by many clinicians working with elderly patients. Unfortunately, spirometers are scarce and thus confirmation of the diagnosis is rare. Biomass fuel, widely used in Africa, can increase the risk of COPD by 3 to 4 times.

It is encouraging to see articles published in this journal touching on common respiratory ailments in the continent. Non-infectious respiratory diseases are common and probably underestimated as we are overwhelmed by infectious diseases. The *African Journal of Respiratory Medicine* not only publishes prevalence studies but also encourages articles about public health intervention – such as vaccines and the appropriate use of antibiotics for infectious diseases, and the impact of clean energy and lifestyle changes on non-infectious respiratory disease.

Dr Evans Amukoye

Contents

2 News/Notes

5 Review Article

Occupational asthma: a review of current concept

F Adewole

8 Review Article

Tuberculosis registers in Africa: a review

R M Nturibi

12 Original Article

Practice of asthma management among doctors in south-east Nigeria

A Ayuk, K Iloh, I Obumneme-Anyi, G Ilechukwu, and T Oguonu

18 Original Article

Home management of acute respiratory infections in a Nigerian district

N U Kingsley and O A Olufemi

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