

THREAT OF HEPATITIS B & C: WHO WILL TAKE THE ACTION

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Hepatitis B and C are devastatingly spreading in our community. The important routes of their transmission are parenteral, sexual and trans-placental.^{1,2,3} Among these, parenteral spread is the most important one. Poorly screened blood transfusions, use of infected surgical instruments, re-use of syringes & needles and the use of sharp tools, like blades & razors by the barbers, are the most common sources in our set up in Pakistan. Poor knowledge in the public about their modes of transmission is also an important factor in their spread.^{4,5,6}

An article in this issue of the journal reveals a serious breach in the disposal of health care waste, especially sharps in the doctor's clinics. Although it was a small study but it unleashed a problem of tremendous importance for public health and safety. A similar study in Murree district previously conducted to describe the injection and sharp waste disposal practices of general practitioners also revealed that most of the doctors were throwing used syringes in the open places and many were disposing them off in the municipal waste bins like an ordinary household waste.⁷ Hazards of these unsafe practices are obvious for the health care workers, municipal workers and general public alike.

We also know that our general public, especially barbers are quite ignorant about the fact that these diseases can get transmitted through the re-use of razors and blades. A study carried out in the capital city Islamabad revealed that the level of awareness among barbers about hepatitis and the risks of its transmission was very low, and the practice of razor re-use that may spread hepatitis was very common. The authors suggested that the messages about hepatitis spread and prevention need to be incorporated in the media campaigns, in addition to regulation of practices.⁸

The studies mentioned, really revealed just the tip of an iceberg. It is now the time to take serious steps to stop these unsafe practices. But who should bell the cat; Health authorities, District management or the Doctors themselves?

Obviously, every one has to play his role. Health authorities have to accept the responsibility of safe waste disposal, whether it is generated in the hospitals or by a general practitioner in his clinic. District management has to hold the barber's hands by banning the use of sharp objects in his shop and

implementing this ban in the true letter and spirit. District Health authorities are also under their control. At the end of the day, if every ear is deaf, the doctors need to recognize their responsibility; by avoiding the unnecessary use of parenteral medications in their practices and clinics and also to shake and wake the Health authorities and District administration.

Is the implementation of these simple measures impossible? Not at all; where there is a will there is a way. The Doctors, Health authorities and District management can sit together to find its solution. Provincial and Federal Health Ministries can also play their roles.

Keeping our fingers crossed, we have to say, "The disaster is at our door step and demands an immediate action."

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