

Knowledge of Tuberculosis in secondary school students: A study in Mchinji district.

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Introduction

Over the past five years the National Tuberculosis Control Programme has spent much effort in trying to educate the general public about tuberculosis (TB).

This has been done by educational talks on the radio, posters, TB messages painted on buses and TB sponsored football matches. We were interested to see how much secondary school students knew about TB, and therefore carried out a questionnaire study in schools in Mchinji district.

Methods and results

Ten secondary schools in Mchinji district were visited, and students in forms 1 – 4 were asked to complete a questionnaire about TB in English. 6 questions demanded a yes/no response, and 4 were open-ended. 86 students (36 boys and 50 girls, whose age ranged from 12 to 20 years) completed the questionnaire, although not all the questions were answered by all the students.

84 (98%) students had heard about TB. 26 (31%) believed it was a bacterial disease, 18 (21%) a viral disease and 14 (16%) that it was a disease attacking the lungs without specifying an infectious aetiology.

TABLE: Sources of information about Tuberculosis

Source of Information	Number of students (%)
Hospital	43 (50%)
Books	30 (35%)
Radio	25 (29%)
Posters	9 (10%)
School	5 (6%)

Some students answered two or more questions which is why the numbers do not add up to 86.

The Table shows where students had obtained information about TB. 61 (71%) students knew of someone who had suffered from TB, and this contributed to knowledge about the disease. 62 (72%) believed that TB could be associated with AIDS, and 20 (23%) believed that it was always associated with AIDS. 73 (85%) said that TB was curable, 78 (91%) said that it could be treated with modern drugs and 6 (7%) that it could be treated with traditional medicine. 47 (55%) students thought that TB was spread through aerosols or through spitting and 34 (40%) that it was transmitted through drinking unpasteurised milk or eating meat. 58 (67%) recognised that TB could be prevented by isolation of TB cases and 27 (31%) by avoiding overcrowding.

Discussion

This study carried out in a rural district of Malawi shows that most secondary school students know something about TB, and that the knowledge in general is reasonable. It is important in health education messages to get over the important points that TB in modern day Malawi is predominately spread by aerosols, that it is not always associated with AIDS and that modern drugs are the most effective ways of treating the disease. IEC (information, education and communication) specialists believe that the medium of radio is a better way of communicating messages

to the general public than posters or leaflets, and indeed almost one third of students in this study had heard about TB through the radio.

Over two thirds of students knew of someone with TB, and perhaps more efforts should be made to encourage patients on TB treatment or those who have completed TB treatment to spread key messages about the disease to the community. TB patients on treatment in Ethiopia form "TB clubs" and contribute to the implementation of the district TB programme¹, while patients who have successfully completed treatment in Ethiopia² and in Tanzania³ also contribute to improving the community's knowledge and practice about TB.

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