



EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Recent global updates in malaria control and situation in Sub-Saharan Africa region

Sahara Altı Afrika Bölgesinde sıtma kontrolü ve durumuna ilişkin global güncelleme

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Dear Editor,

Malaria continues to be one of the major global public health concerns and a life-threatening illness affecting humans¹. The estimates for the year 2015 indicate that despite the disease being a preventable and a curable condition, in excess of 210 million cases and 0.43 million deaths have been attributed to the infection worldwide². In-fact, children in the under-five age group have been extremely susceptible to acquire the infection or develop complications, including mortality, as 7 out of 10 malaria associated deaths are being reported in this age group². Furthermore, it has been reported that more than 90 nations still have evidences of disease transmission, which is a major cause of concern for the stakeholders^{1,2}.

Owing to the magnitude, geographical distribution, associated complications, and the burden on the health system, the prevention and control of the disease has attracted attention from international leaders and donor agencies^{1,3}. In-fact, to respond to the challenges posed by the disease, it was incorporated as one of the key targets in the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently in the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals^{1,3}.

Moreover, due to the sustained and integrated efforts of the involved sectors, a reduction of 21% and 29% in the incidence and mortality rates was reported in the period 2000 and 2015². Even though, the estimates suggest that close to 7 million

deaths have been avoided since the start of the 21st century, the disease still accounts for the death of an under-five child every two minutes².

The Sub-Saharan Africa region deserves a special mention as it accounts for almost 90% and 92% of the new cases and associated deaths reported worldwide respectively⁴. The trends of incidence or death rates have gradually begun to decline due to increase in the diagnostic testing among children, expansion of prophylactic therapy among pregnant females (intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy with three or more doses of sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine during antenatal visits), and use of insecticide-treated nets by more than 50% of the population at risk in the region⁴.

Nevertheless, significant lacunae still persists with regard to different dimensions, such as coverage of services, inadequate funding, fragile healthcare delivery system, poor awareness about the disease in remote regions, infrastructure constraints, and conclusive reports of emergence of resistance to the drug as well as the insecticides^{1,4,5}.

However, there is a bright ray of hope to meet the global target of eliminating the disease in ten nations by 2020, as some of the nations have reported less than 150 local cases, while Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka have been certified for the elimination of the disease in 2016 itself^{2,4}. Nevertheless, to ensure that we make a sustained progress on other fronts also, especially with regard to a reduction in the incidence of cases and the deaths, there is a considerable need

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for sustained and sufficient funding^{1,4}.

In-fact, in the year 2015, only 45% of the expected funding to attain global targets by 2020 was arranged, as a result of which most activities recommended under the program are not up to the mark². At the same time, it will be one of the biggest milestones in the history of the prevention and control of the disease, if favorable results are obtained from the pilot phase of the RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine^{1,4}.

To conclude, definite signs of progress in malaria prevention and control have been observed, but the world is still struggling to achieve higher levels of program coverage that is essential to beat the disease. Thus, if the international agencies aim to achieve the proposed global targets, they have to simultaneously increase funding from both domestic and international agencies substantially.

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