



EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Strengthening the public health response to combat the global problem of viral hepatitis

Küresel viral hepatit problemiyle mücadelede halk sağlığı yanıtının güçlendirilmesi

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To the Editor,

Viral hepatitis has been regarded as one of the major public health concerns that require an immediate and comprehensive response for its prevention and control^{1,2}. In-fact, viral hepatitis accounted for more than 1.3 million deaths, predominantly due to chronic liver disease and liver malignancy in the year 2015, of which more than 95% are due to either hepatitis B virus (HBV) or hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection¹. In addition, in excess of 250 million and 70 million people are living with chronic hepatitis B and C infection globally, with hepatitis B is more common in the African region, while hepatitis C is predominant in the Eastern Mediterranean region¹.

Realizing the magnitude of the problem, a global strategy was developed for the period of 2016-2021, that calls for the elimination of the disease as a public health threat by the year 2030³. The aim of the strategy is to investigate 90% and offer treatment to 80% of individuals with hepatitis B and C infection by the end of third decade of the current century¹. However, the available estimates for the year 2015 indicate that only 9% and 20% of all HBV and HCV infected individuals were detected, while only 8% and 7% of the overall diagnosed HBV and HCV people were started on treatment¹. All these are alarming estimates and clearly indicate that there is an immense gap in the field of diagnostics and treatment arena, and due to which most of the affected people are presenting late with complications¹⁻³.

The presence of vaccine against HBV has significantly reduced the incidence among children, but then most of the other preventive approaches against HBV & HCV have not been adequately implemented³. However, it is very well known that the nations which have shown their commitment towards strengthening of the diagnostic & treatment services, and a reduction in the cost of diagnostic tests or drugs, are very much on track to eliminate the disease³. Considering that the patients infected with HBV require therapy for their entire life, it is of utmost priority to ensure that the drugs are affordable by people from all socioeconomic classes³.

Moreover, the road to elimination calls for a comprehensive public health approach comprising of strategies like the development of a strategic information system based on scaling up of surveillance activities, expansion of testing and treatment services, better delivery of the hepatitis services to all those who need it, sustained financial support, and adoption of newer innovations in the various related fields (viz. diagnostics, treatments, cure and vaccines)¹⁻³.

To conclude, definitive opportunities exist for improving the existing scenario of viral hepatitis on the global scale. However, it essentially requires commitment from the policy makers, international welfare agencies, and other concerned stakeholders to eventually ensure that the desired resources are equitably available and affordable to all.

REFERENCES

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