EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Introduction of the world’s first malaria vaccine in Malawi: World Health Organization

Malawi’de dünyanın ilk sıtma aşısının tanıtımı: Dünya Sağlık Örgütü

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To the Editor,

Malaria in humans is a life threatening disease resulting because of the 5 parasite species, and is a global public health concern1,2. Acknowledging the fact that the disease is preventable and curable, it is a significant cause of concern that almost 220 million cases and 044 million deaths were reported worldwide in the year 20171. Children under 5 years of age were identified as the most vulnerable age-group and the African region has been the worst affected, both in terms of number of cases and number of deaths1. Further, it is an alarming fact that close to 50% of the world’s population is at the risk of disease and that 87 nations still had on-going malaria transmission1,2.

Considering the magnitude of the disease, associated complications, life-threatening nature of the disease, global distribution, enormous burden on the health system and preventable/curable nature of the disease, the global leaders have decided to eliminate (viz. interruption of local transmission of a specific species in an earmarked geographical region) the disease1,3. In order to accomplish the same, different measures have been taken, including strengthening of the prevention, diagnostic & curative modalities and adoption of innovative strategies in a tailor-made manner to meet the existing challenges in a specific region1,3.

Despite all these measures, the rate of decline in the number of cases / deaths is not in proportion with the set targets and in some regions it has started to even reverse, and one of the main reasons for the same is the absence of an effective vaccine to counter the disease1. However, it is a happy news that after 3 decades of hard work and dedicated efforts and financial investments, RTS,S / AS01 vaccine has been recognized as the first and the only vaccine to significantly minimize the incidence of disease among children4. In addition, the rates of hospital admission, and the need for blood transfusions, significantly reduced during the trial4.

Taking all these benefits into account, the Government of Malawi gave a green signal to the introduction of the world’s first vaccine targeting the disease and will be administered to children up to 2 years of age across 11 districts4,5. Further, it has been planned to introduce the vaccine in Ghana and Kenya in the coming days, and it is a welcome step as a sizeable proportion of cases and deaths are reported from the region4. It is high time that in order to bring the malaria control strategies back on track, the ongoing efforts are strengthened with a much-awaited tool of vaccine, which has the potential to save the lives of a significant number of children5.

The aim of the pilot project is to administer vaccine to 0.36 million children each year in 3 nations, and then formulate recommendations for the mass-scale use of the vaccine based on the evidence and the experience gained during the pilot run4,5. The
assessed parameters will include reduction in the number of child deaths, vaccine uptake and its safety aspect. Obviously, the successful run will require support from the entire team of healthcare professionals in the nations and continued support from the political leaders and international welfare agencies.

In conclusion, the introduction of a malaria vaccine is a much awaited weapon in the battle against the disease and it is the need of the hour to extend full cooperation and support to the prevention and control activities to save the lives of millions of the general population.

REFERENCES


