

## ABSTRACT

Rabies is a very important zoonotic disease, in Sri Lanka, mainly due to its colossal economic loss to the country and loss of human lives. If a person gets exposed to a rabid animal, the situation is considered to be a medical urgency but not a medical emergency. Once the symptoms of the disease develop it is 100% fatal. When a person is exposed to a suspected rabid animal, prophylaxis should be commenced as soon as possible. A delay may result in development of rabies. Some of the factors, that may affect, the timely post exposure prophylaxis, of human rabies need to be studied, in order to improve effectiveness of the post exposure prophylaxis and to improve quality of care given to those victims. In spite of large investments on this single disease, emergence of rabies may occur, as a result of ineffective control measures.

Especially, in a developing country like Sri Lanka, many factors such as socio-demographic, socio-economic, cultural, character of exposure and health service related factors can influence people, timely post exposure prophylaxis of human rabies.

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out at Colombo South Teaching Hospital, to describe some selected factors that affect the timely post exposure prophylaxis of patients, after exposure to suspected rabid animals. A study sample was selected from all the patients who came for immunizations as a part of post exposure prophylaxis of human rabies for the first dose (day zero), of treatment schedule. The sample was obtained within a time period between 8a.m. to 4p.m, until the required sample number was reached. A formula was used to calculate the required sample size.

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three types of data collecting instrument  
questionnaire, checklist and focus group

use  
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interviewer  
to gather

relevant information. Focus Group discussion was carried out to describe health services related factors affecting timely post exposure prophylaxis due to ethical considerations on interviewing patients.

In this study, it was revealed that only less than 10% of patients of the study sample received post exposure prophylaxis within two hours of the exposure. Majority of patients were delayed at receiving vaccinations. However, patients who are delayed to reach the hospital are further delayed at Colombo South Teaching Hospital due to services related issues. Large numbers of patients are bypassing smaller government health facilities to come to Colombo South Teaching Hospital for anti rabies vaccinations.

Unorganised anti rabies treatment procedures at peripheral government health institutions, restricted working hours (opening hours) of the anti rabies unit, of the Out Patients Department at Colombo South Teaching Hospital and lack of awareness of the health staff, regarding urgent nature of the care for the prevention, are the main causes of the delays for prophylaxis at Colombo South Teaching Hospital.

Therefore, in this study recommendations are made to strengthen the peripheral government health institutions with regard to establishment of special anti rabies clinics at all Out Patient Departments and to ensure effective continued awareness campaigns on community and health staff, regarding importance of timely post exposure prophylaxis for anti rabies.

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