

ABSTRACT

Background

Pandemics such as Avian Influenza and Ebola are unpredictable but recurring events that can have devastating consequences. Although Sri Lanka is an island separated from other countries, the risk of getting such disease is not less due to current trends of travel and trade.

Out of all categories of health care workers, Medical Officers are at the forefront of managing a pandemic response. Concurrently, they are at increased risk of getting exposed to such infections. Therefore, the knowledge and attitudes and the practices with regard to these disease conditions are of crucial importance on assessing their preparedness for such pandemics.

Objectives

To assess knowledge, attitudes and practices of Medical Officers at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital Colombo on preparedness for selected diseases with pandemic potential.

Method

Institution based descriptive cross sectional study was carried out in the Lady Ridgeway Hospital, Colombo from August to October 2016 inviting all (119) the Medical Officers registered in SLMC who working in OPD, PCU, MICU, Medical wards and Isolation unit. A pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was used to assess knowledge on causative organism, transmission, clinical manifestations, laboratory diagnosis, treatment, notification and surveillance procedure with regard to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), attitudes towards working during such pandemics, learning more about disease conditions, willingness to participate in simulation exercises and awareness of practices in the view of standard and isolation precautions. Data collection was performed by principal investigator. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 21 software.

Results

Response rate was 93.27% (n=111). Mean age was 36 years (SD=7.6). Of the respondents, only 31.5% (n=35) had a good level of knowledge on HPAI with >70% of correct response rate regarding: the disease not being transmitted by properly cooked meat, (76.6%; n=85), Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome being a clinical manifestation, (73.0%; n=81), oseltamivir being the treatment of choice, (70.3%; n=78) and notification of cases to relevant Medical Officer of health, (60.3%; n=78). Out of the respondents 39.6% (n=44) had good level of knowledge on EVD but <50% of the respondents were correct on the fact that the diagnostic tests for the disease are not performed in Sri Lanka. Overall knowledge was good among 36.9% (n=41) of the respondents and average among 49.5% (n=55).

Of the respondents, 64.0% (n=71) had favourable attitude towards working during a pandemic of HPAI but, 36.9% (n=41) were afraid of falling ill with the disease, (5.4%; n=6) stated that they will consider about resigning due to the risk; 59.5% (n=66) showed a favourable attitude on handling a situation of EVD. Of the respondents, 56.8% (n=63) perceived the risk as part of their job; 46.8% (n=52) were afraid of falling ill with the disease however 76.6% (n=85) stated that they would like to learn more about the disease conditions and 73.9% (n=82) would like to participate in simulation exercises based on pandemic situations.

Overall score on practices was average among 46.8% (n=52). Although 20.7% (n=23) has undergone training on Personnel Protective Equipment, only 14.4% (n=16) reported the correct sequence of donning PPE, however 60.4% (n=67) reported correctly where to get advice for it. Of the respondents, 75.7% (N=84) were aware about using separate patient care equipment but only 45% (n=50) reported correctly the minimum distance that the beds should keep to prevent airborne transmission.

Conclusion

Overall knowledge of the participants was of average level, specifically lacking in areas of recognizing causative organism and diagnostic tests. Although the participants elicited favourable attitude towards working in pandemic situations most of them were afraid of falling ill with the disease. There was good response towards learning more about the disease and participating on simulation exercises.

Average level of awareness on practices was detected with lapses in areas of using PPE and following isolation precautions such as, using negative pressure rooms and keeping a minimum distance between beds.

Recommendation

The study shows the need for implementing training programmes to address the gaps in knowledge attitudes and practices. There should be special emphasis on conducting training programmes on specific infection control measures that should be followed in pandemic situations regularly. Furthermore, simulation exercises should be carried out at least once a year based on managing a incident of such infectious disease.