

Access to and Use of Medicines in Barbados: Evidence from a Household Survey

Hinds, Maryam (1); Ivama, Adriana M. (2); Mulder, Carol (3); Ross-Degnan, Dennis (4); Vialle-Valentin, Catherine E. (4)
bds@caribsurf.com

1: Barbados Drug Services, Ministry of Health, Bridgetown, Barbados; 2: Office of Caribbean Program Coordination (CPC), Pan American Health Organization/ World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), Bridgetown, Barbados; 3: University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados; 4: Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA

Problem Statement

Barbados is a middle-income country with high prevalence of diabetes and hypertension. Medicines are free at all public and private points of service for persons over age 65 or under age 16, and for those receiving prescribed medicines listed on the National Drug Formulary (NDF) for diabetes, hypertension, cancer, asthma, and epilepsy. At all dispensing facilities, all citizens and permanent residents, that are eligible, do not pay for prescribed medicines that are in the BNDF. Since April 1st 2011, at private pharmacies, a dispensing fee has been re-introduced. Monitoring the effects of this policy is critical to ensure that it meets the objective of adequate cost-effective access to medicines and appropriate use for all Barbadians.

Objective

To generate reliable evidence for policy makers in Barbados about current medicines access and use at the community level.

Design and Settings

Design: Descriptive analysis of survey data with technical support from PAHO/WHO and Harvard Medical School.

Setting: Household survey conducted in Barbados in 2010 with a questionnaire developed by WHO.

Study Population and Outcome Measures

Study Population: Surveyed households were selected by random stratified sampling (n = 317). Those with asset and expenditure data (n = 272) were classified into "higher" (n = 160) or "lower" (n=112) Socio-Economic Status (SES) groups according to their total monthly expenditure (predefined threshold at BBD800) and reported ownership of preselected assets. The percentage of households reporting at least one chronic disease in the higher and lower groups was 53% and 67% respectively.

Outcome Measures: Indicators of medicines access and use.

Figure 1. Geographic location of statistical sample areas, Barbados, 2010.

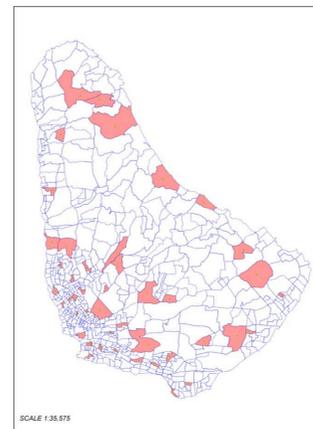
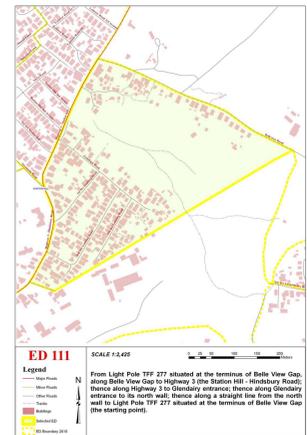


Figure 2. Stratified Random sampling area identifying households, Barbados, 2010.



Key Results

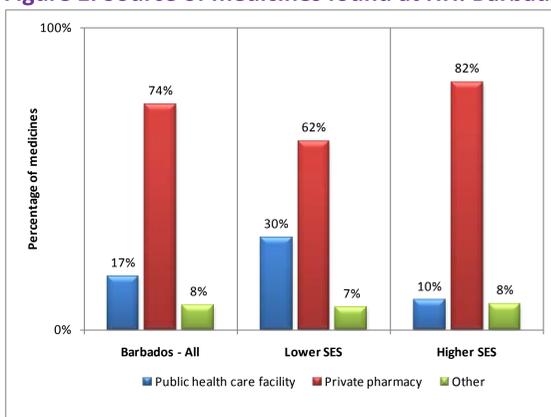
Geographical Accessibility

All surveyed households were at less than 1 hour travel from a health care facility of any kind, public or private.

Availability

The percentage of households keeping medicines at home in the higher and lower groups was 76% and 71% respectively. The percentage of persons who obtained medicines free for their chronic disease was 74% in the higher group vs. 98% in the lower group;

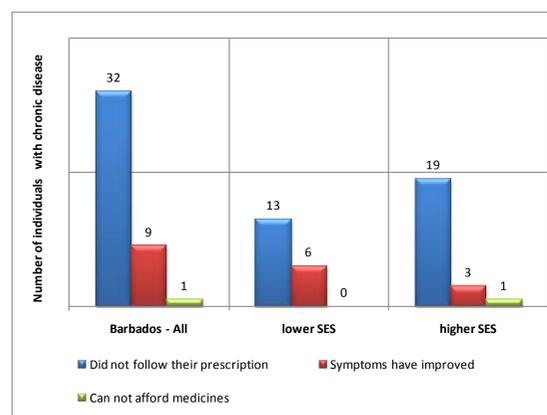
Figure 1. Source of medicines found at HH. Barbados, 2010



Affordability

- ✓ The price paid for medicines is not a major obstacle to accessing medicines
- ✓ Larger proportion of individuals received free medicines for chronic diseases than for acute illnesses
- ✓ 3% of respondents reported spending more than 40% of their non-food expenditures on medicines over the past four weeks.

Figure 2. Reasons for not taking medicines prescribed for a chronic disease, Barbados, 2010.



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Participating Institutions

Collaboration from

- ✓ Barbados Statistical Services (BSS)
- ✓ Government Information Service (GIS)

Conclusions

Overall, our results indicate good community access to medicines in Barbados with notable differences in access between lower and higher SES groups for people with chronic disease. They draw attention to misconceptions about treatment of chronic diseases and point to the need for interventions convincing people with chronic disease to continue treatment even if symptoms improve.