

Trinidad & Tobago: Challenges and opportunities to improve access to NCD medicines

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HEALTH SYSTEM PROFILE

- Trinidad and Tobago has a population of approximately 1.4 million. The non-communicable diseases - Cardiovascular disease, Diabetes, Cancer and Cerebrovascular disease - are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality.
- Health care is free for all citizens, with universal access and island-wide coverage.
- A significant percentage of the national drug budget is used to provide access to medicines and health services for patients with NCDs.



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- The information received by the Ministry of Health from the health centres are limited to “Utilisation of Service” reports as part of the regular reporting mechanism.
- There is a plan to use an IT based system to collect epidemiology and surveillance data.



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- Information about consumption and availability of medicines is transmitted electronically from all pharmacies in the public sector to the Principal Pharmacist in the Ministry of Health, who is responsible for the collation and maintenance of a database.



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- The pharmaceutical stock status database is used to:
 - Validate forecasting and purchasing,
 - Identify the need for interventions where there is poor inventory management and
 - Identify inequitable distribution of stock in the pharmacies



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- Stock is distributed to health centres, based on requisitions from the pharmacist to NIPDEC, the agency responsible for procurement, storage and distribution of medicines in the public sector.
- Health centres/pharmacies are required to keep a maximum of 3 months' stock and a minimum of 1 month's stock



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- Health centres sometimes overestimate what they need, especially for those medicines for which there are chronic stockouts.
- Feedback is provided to pharmacists on overstocking and methods to be used for proper forecasting.



INFORMATION SYSTEM

- Generally, stock consumption reports are accurate. However there are some pharmacies who submit high consumption and/or low stock balance reports, for fear that excess stock will be reallocated when identified.
- There is currently no mechanism to ensure the integrity of the reported data but there are plans to introduce a national integrated inventory management system which will ensure the accuracy of the data supplied to the Ministry of Health.



FORECASTING METHODOLOGY

- The pharmacies, Medical Supply stores and recently some consultant groups participate in the forecasting exercise, annually.



FORECASTING METHODOLOGY

- The consumption method is used for forecasting
- It is assumed that the consumption data is based on a consistent and reliable supply during a period with no stockouts.
- Consumption data may or may not reflect rational prescribing and use of medicines or actual demand for medicines.

CHALLENGES TO CONTINUOUS ACCESS

- The main challenges in improving and achieving continuous access to NCD medicines in Trinidad and Tobago include:
 - lack of or non-adherence to Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs),
 - inappropriate and ineffective use of medicines,
 - funding availability,



CHALLENGES TO CONTINUOUS ACCESS

- the demand for new high-priced medicines,
- the underuse of quality generic drugs due to concerns by both physicians and patients about the bioequivalence and possible side effects of generic drugs,
- unreliability of supply,



CHALLENGES TO CONTINUOUS ACCESS

- inadequate regulatory capacity - responsible for backlog in registration of new medicines and the inability to properly evaluate biological medicines,
- poor inventory management,
- inaccessibility of some medicines



CHALLENGES TO CONTINUOUS ACCESS

- PAHO can help to alleviate these challenges by:
 - Providing technical support in promoting the rational use of essential medicines
 - Ensuring the supply of quality medicines
 - Sourcing those medicines which are difficult to access
 - Assisting with the establishment of the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS) for registration of medicines

PROCUREMENT PRACTICES

- Medicines are procured by:
 - annual tender,
 - ad hoc purchases when there are stockouts, or upon request by a physician for a drug which is not on the National Formulary, or
 - loans from other Caribbean countries when there are critical stockouts
- There is a national medicine policy that promotes the use of multi-source medicine.



SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Strategies which can be implemented in order to improve access to NCD medicines in Trinidad and Tobago include:
 - Installation of a national, electronic, integrated inventory management system to enable more accurate forecasting and improve inventory management
 - Establishment of and adherence to STGs
 - Promotion of rational drug use
 - Improvement in Regulatory capacity



SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Procurement through the PAHO Strategic Fund, especially for those medicines which are difficult to source or very expensive
- Pooling of resources with other Caribbean /Caricom counties where volumes required are too small to attract suppliers