

Deficiency in the awareness of Hepatitis B amongst students of medical colleges- Alarm!Nava Asad Dohadhwal,¹ Syed Mustajab Ahmed²

Madam, worldwide, two billion people are estimated to be suffering from Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection and 600,000 people die every year due to its consequences.¹ This constitutes about one third of the World's population. Hence, HBV is behind considerable morbidity and mortality worldwide.¹ The prevalence of hepatitis B varies amongst different parts of the world, which is between 0.1 to 20 percent. Seventy five percent of the chronic carriers of hepatitis B are Asians.²

Being an Asian country, Pakistan has a high prevalence of people infected with the HBV. Various studies carried out in Pakistan have clearly showed that medical students do not have sufficient information regarding blood borne diseases.^{3,4}

Health care workers are predisposed to higher risks of contracting HBV as it is transmitted through blood and body fluids and accidental contact with these fluids is inevitable while treating the patients. This risk is even higher amongst medical students during their clinical years as they have inadequate experience and skills and the exposure to contaminated fluids becomes far more likely.⁴ Yet, there is significant lack of awareness among medical students about themselves being at risk of contracting hepatitis B. According to Nisar N et al., only 3.3% students consider medical students as high risk group.⁴ Literature also tells that about half of the students do not know about needle stick safety³ despite the fact that the risk of transmission of blood borne infection after a needle stick injury is significantly worrisome, since the risk of contracting HBV after parenteral exposure is 30 percent.⁵

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¹3rd Year Medical Student, ²4th Year Medical Student, Dow Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi.

Correspondence: Syed Mustajab Ahmed. Email: smustajabahmed@gmail.com

Moreover, it has also been observed that students of preclinical years have less information about the disease than those of clinical years.^{3,4}

Such deficiency of knowledge among future doctors along with the rise in the prevalence of HBV disease poses a great threat to the people involved in healthcare. Medical students, in addition to healthcare workers, need to have a thorough knowledge regarding HBV, its mode of transmission and the benefits of vaccination so that they not only could protect themselves better but also promote better management of this disease in the society.

It could be concluded that there is a need in medical universities to emphasize on vaccinating the students before they join clinical practice to avoid any accidents or mishaps from happening. Also, medical universities should have screening and vaccination programmes for HBV as this virus is highly infective yet has an effective and safe vaccine available. HBV can cause several complications and there seems to be an urgent need for universities to introduce measures that would help control its spread.

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