Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

COVID-19: an opportunity to improve infection prevention and control in LMICs

We congratulate Paul Sonenthal and colleagues (July 2020)[1] for the timely assessment of COVID-19 preparedness in Malawi. The authors highlight clear gaps in infection prevention and control, including the availability of personal protective equipment, but cautiously suggest that these findings might not be generalisable to other low-income and middle-income countries. We did detailed surveys before the COVID-19 pandemic to evaluate water sanitation and hygiene, and infection prevention and control preparedness at 14 Kenyan public hospitals.[2] From the surveys, we noted that, even for these large facilities, there were challenges in providing adequately treated water. Additionally, there were scarce resources available to install new hand hygiene and waste disposal structures, especially in locations where they were absent.[3]

We found that the responsibility for water sanitation and hygiene, and infection prevention and control in hospitals is often poorly defined. Working with stakeholders, we developed a framework to assign responsibility to specific groups within the hospital and regional governments on the basis of their capacity for action. This framework allowed us to identify the specific groups who were best placed to tackle the problems we had highlighted. One of the important groups identified was the hospital's infection prevention and control committee.[4] Our prepandemic survey suggested that these committees were inactive and poorly constituted.[3] The low status and awareness of infection prevention and control in the hospitals contributed to these committees being largely dormant.[4] However, from our interviews with health-care workers done during the COVID-19 pandemic in April, 2020, we found that these infection prevention and control committees are playing a crucial role in training medical staff on personal protective equipment use and infection prevention and control procedures (Maina M, unpublished).

These committees can provide strategic leadership on the purchase of good quality infection prevention and control materials, and address any deficiencies in the hand hygiene and waste management infrastructure.

With infection prevention and control playing a crucial role in the management of COVID-19, it provides an opportunity for the proper training of all health workers on the best infection prevention and control practices (Maina M, unpublished).

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to strengthen crucial aspects of the health-care system that have been previously overlooked.[5] These aspects include the infection prevention and control infrastructure and the formation of active infection prevention and control committees to provide much-needed leadership. These improvements will prove to be valuable not only during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in the fight against other infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance.

We declare no competing interests.

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