



Knowledge and Practice of Maasai Herbalists

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Introduction

Maasai herbalists are famous in many areas in Tanzania including Singida municipal. The herbalists claim that their herbal medications cure urinary tract infection (UTI) along with other disease conditions.

We noted that some students and other people from the community visit the Maasai herbalist to buy herbal medications frequently when they fall sick.

In some cases, they visit the herbalists following the diagnosis of UTI from the established diagnostic centres. And sometimes people do not go to hospital or to a diagnostic centre, instead they visit the herbalists for both diagnosis and treatment.

Method

What is UTI?

UTI is a bacterial infection that affects the urinary system specifically the urinary tract. causative agents include E-coli and Gonococcus. Infection can transfer from the rectum, through the urethra into to the urinary bladder.

An infection limited to the urethra is called Urethritis. Infection in the urinary bladder it is called cystitis. Pyelonephritis is when infection ascends to the kidney.

Females are at higher risk of getting UTI because they have a shorter urethra which makes it easier for bacteria to ascend to the bladder.

Data was collected using questionnaire. Questionnaires were set for the Herbal Vendors, Medical Doctors and patients (diagnosed to have UTI).

Scientific names of herbal medication were provided by the Tropical Pesticides Research Institute (TPRI) – Arusha. We requested the TPRI to provide us the scientific names of plants that were mentioned by the Maasai herbalists as source of their herbal preparations

ANTIBIOTIC	DOSAGE FOR ADULTS	DOSAGE FOR CHILDREN
Nitrofurantoin (PO)	500 mg 12 hourly for 7 days	50 mg 12 hourly for 5 days
Amoxicillin + Clavulanic acid (FDC) (PO)	625 mg 12 hourly for 7 days	40 mg/Kg/day of amoxicillin for 7 days
Ciprofloxacin (PO)	500 mg 12 hourly for 10 days of 7 days depending on the intense of the disease	
Ceftriaxone (IV)		1 g [for child ceftriaxone 80 mg/ Kg / (I.V or I.M)] for 24 hourly for 5 days

Antibiotics	Dosage
cefuroxime	750 mg every after 8hrs
Cephalexin	200mg every after 8hrs
Cetirizine	1g every after 8hrs
cotrimoxole	Every after 8hrs

Results

Reasons for people to visit Maasai Herbalists for treatment

A total of 18 patients were interviewed. Most frequent reasons for visiting Maasai herbalists included:

- They heard from their friends and relatives that these medicines cure UTI and therefore they decided to try the medication.
- Others said that they decided to visit the Maasai Herbal vendors because they were not cured of their disease when they used the modern medicine that is why they decided to look for another alternative.
- A few said that they visited the Maasai Herbal vendors because they had no Health Insurance, going to hospital would cost them more money.

(The Cost of one dose of UTI from Maasai Vendors is between 10,000/= and 15,000/= Tsh, but the cost is also negotiable where less than that is agreeable between the customer and seller.)

Vendors knowledge

We learned that most of herbal vendors acquired knowledge on UTI from their elders. Few of them claimed to acquire the knowledge on UTI through their age mates (through working together for a time) none of them had attended a seminar or workshop conducted by qualified Medical doctors.

Conclusion

From the above information we learned knowledge about UTI is suboptimal among most of the Maasai herbalists.

This to us is not good since some of the symptoms resemble other diseases symptoms so the customers might get wrong medication. The other thing is the dosage, there is no uniformity in their dosage.

Different herbalists dispense the same medicine in different volumes. The medicine mixtures is also not uniform every herbalist decides working on his or her own mixture so the dosage received from one herbalist to another is different.

We came out with an advice that if possible there should be a law that every herbal vendor should attend either workshop or seminar conducted by medical doctors under Minister of health and given a certificate at least to know some of the important symptoms likewise the research institute should give to public or to these herbalists an estimated dosage to herbal medicines so as to have uniformity in dispensing.



References

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