

## **Jessica Sleeth: 'Assessing health system mechanisms for hypertension management in Northern Tanzania - a patient perspective'**

**Introduction:** Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are an increasing challenge to health systems in low-income countries. The recent past was focused on communicable diseases such as HIV, however Tanzania is currently facing the emerging burden of NCDs. Hypertension affects approximately 30% of Tanzanian adults and is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular diseases that will greatly affect population health. Applying a methodology developed by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, this study conducts a multi-method appraisal of the Tanzanian health system regarding hypertension management and control from a patient perspective.

**Methods:** The appraisal was undertaken across two regions in northern Tanzania. Drawing from a literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, health professionals and patients, exploring hypertension management. The study aims to identify modifiable system-level barriers to effective hypertension management. Interviews were transcribed, coded using NVivo software and analysed using a conceptual framework.

**Results:** Preliminary findings indicate significant discord between policy and reality of patient experiences; the Ministry of Health has developed a NCD strategy, yet little progress has been made in delivering programmes. Public clinics are poorly resourced and staff are unable to manage hypertensive patients effectively. There is little emergency care available for patients with acute events related to hypertension. Poor drug procurement at a national level affects a patient's ability to access anti-hypertension drugs. There is also a lack of patient awareness on the chronic nature of hypertension, resulting in poor drug adherence.

**Discussion:** In Tanzania, little provision of care is currently available for the growing number of patients with hypertension. It is suggested that community-level awareness and mHealth technology initiatives could be effective given the appropriate support from policy level, as has been proven in managing HIV/AIDS. However more research on the effectiveness of interventions for NCD management in low-income countries is required.