

Diagnosis and referral practices of healthcare providers' in regard to neglected tropical diseases related to persistent fever syndrome: an explorative qualitative study in Eastern Nepal

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INTRODUCTION : Febrile illness is one of the most common reasons for seeking medical attention in Nepal. Infectious diseases associated with the persistent fever syndrome are on the increase. Both healthcare providers and patients face significant challenges regarding the diagnosis and clinical management of neglected tropical diseases, at rural health facilities. We conducted an exploratory qualitative study to better understand the current diagnostic and referral practices of healthcare providers related to the persistent fever syndrome at primary healthcare center.

METHODS: We conducted an explorative qualitative study consisting of sequentially organized observations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with healthcare providers. This study was implemented in primary healthcare centers and reference hospitals. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Data was analyzed using N/Vivo Qualitative Analysis Software (QSR International Pvt Ltd., Cardigan, UK).

RESULTS: Healthcare providers were not overly familiar with the term persistent fever syndrome, although knowledge about associated symptoms and infectious diseases was good. Symptomatic treatment was mostly practiced at primary healthcare level, while reference hospitals employed a diagnostics-based approach. Limited diagnostic facilities and high volume of patients were some of the factors underlying limited diagnostic-based practices. No specific protocols were available for the diagnosis and management of Persistent Fever Syndrome. Only few Persistent Fever Syndrome patients seem to be referred to a higher-level for further diagnostic work-up and clinical management. Financial concerns, community beliefs and folklore and delays in seeking care were an important barrier to referral.

CONCLUSION: An improved understanding of the current diagnosis and referral practices of healthcare providers is an important first step in developing and introducing new clinical algorithms. There is a perceived need for a clinical algorithm that would enable a systematic approach in diagnosis and case management of neglected tropical diseases with persistent fever syndrome at the primary healthcare level.