HEALTH CARE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT IN UGANDA: THE CASE OF ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS IN KABAROLE DISTRICT

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Abstract: Proper health care management practice is an integral part of health care delivery for the prevention of disease outbreaks, proper preservation of the environment, and promotion of population health care and safety. The study was conducted between April 2014 and June 2014 in the western part of Uganda, Fort Portal Regional referral, by the School of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing and Midwifery. The overall aim of this pilot study was to identify the gaps in health care and management and its potential impact on the environment in order to assure population safety and environmental conservation. This was a descriptive cross-sectional observational study that employed a mixed qualitative and quantitative method of data collection. A well-designed and structured questionnaire was used and an observational checklist was prepared. The researchers took time (8 weeks) in 15 hospital departments observing the way waste is collected, segregated, stored, transported, and disposed of, all potential risk factors that might likely impact negatively the environment in this area of Uganda. Our study revealed a major general problem of poor waste management in the hospital, and 86.7% (13/15) of the hospital departments had significant gaps in waste management, and thus were assigned a total score of 40%, while 13.3% (2/15) of the departments scored over 70% for improper waste collection techniques, segregation into proper bins, proper storage, and proper handling during transportation for safe disposal. Paradoxically, the two departments had displayed protocol guidelines on infection prevention. The 40% score on infection prevention was based on a number of factors, such as collecting waste in open boxes; leaving color-coded bins clean; and poor waste segregation, including used soiled gloves, which were dumped in a black bin, along with used needles, injections, and other hospital by-products. Waste spills were overflowing and were not covered at the storage site, which immediately raised serious concern among the researchers. Following were the challenges revealed by the study: Enormous garbage collected by the hospital, which proved to be too difficult to manage; General problems in the waste care management process; Lack of knowledge and skills in proper waste management among the staff; Lack of hospital “champions” in infection control to spearhead the campaign for a safer environment; Waste handlers not trained and lack of protective gear use among the majority of the personnel handling the solid and liquid waste; Inadequate supply of waste bins which were poorly labelled, while those used lacked lids; Uncovered placenta bin whose smell was clearly polluting the environment and attracting flies and other insects around the pit; Poor disposal methods of waste care and disposal, obviously posing a threat to the health of the public; and Improper utilization of the incinerator, which is used for storage of old mattresses and buckets. The poor waste management at Fort Portal region referral may be responsible for outbreaks of diseases like measles, diarrhea, and tuberculosis in the Fort Portal Municipality. Without aggressive intervention, the nation is likely to spend, in the long-run, an enormous amount of resources on disease outbreaks in the region. This pilot study calls for further and definitive studies using larger sample sizes and a stronger commitment to public health on the part of the leadership as well as the crafting of enforceable policies by the Ugandan national and local municipal authorities, including those at Fort Portal, targeting the environment, air and ground pollution, hygiene, sanitation, and proper waste disposal to protect the health of the public, most of which may not even be aware of the known health hazards that result from unsafe environmental unsafe conditions.

Key words: Health, environment, waste, waste disposal, diarrhea, tuberculosis, placenta, environment.