

Being prepared ... Being able to deal better with epidemic

During the first quarter of this year, Sudan has experienced many epidemics at a time. The list includes cholera, meningococcal meningitis, dengue fever, yellow fever and malaria. As the others were localized outbreak we will concentrate on the cholera epidemic.

The cholera epidemic started at Yai in the south of Sudan, moved with returnees to Juba and then spread into many parts of the south. The lack of safe water supply coupled with poor sanitation played an important role in the spread of the disease. The quick response from Federal Ministry of Health, WHO, Unicef and many NGOs has kept the fatality rate to the lowest. The Federal Ministry of Health, Department of Epidemiology, quickly established preventive measures at Kosti city bearing in mind that, if the disease reached Kosti then it will easily flare up to east, west and the north. The measures taken at Kosti were super-chlorination of water with establishing an active daily surveillance system. To date, although the risk of cholera outbreak in Kosti is low, the possibility is still there.

Despite the nature and extent of any epidemic, the key to control is "timely response" and the key to that is "being prepared". This implies having preparedness plan, sensitive surveillance system, having a trained response team/s and buffer stock. Particularly relevant to cholera, without involving the water sector, cholera cannot be controlled.

The main lesson Sudan can get out of these epidemics is that capacity building is absolutely fundamental in the domain of epidemics control. In addition to preparedness, logistics and supplies, training of staff is extremely important. Capacity building for community physicians and public health personnel is highly needed in aspects such as surveillance, field epidemiology and disaster management. This high caliber staff is also needed at the level of the state so that "timely response" can be initiated by the state rather than just waiting for the federal level to come.

Elfatih M. Malik