

# Awareness of leprosy among leprosy patients attending the Dermatology Clinic, Colombo North Teaching Hospital (CNTH) Ragama from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2016

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## Objectives

This study was conducted to assess the knowledge of leprosy among leprosy patients attending the Skin Clinic of CNTH Ragama with the specific objectives of finding source of information used by the patients to seek medical advice, categorize and identify the severity of the disease at the time of presentation and identify reasons for delay in presenting to a skin clinic.

## Method

A descriptive cross sectional study was carried out at the CNTH Dermatology Clinic during the stipulated study period. All newly diagnosed leprosy patients over 12 years of age with good mental health were included in the study. The data was collected using pretested interviewer administered questionnaire and entered into IBM SPSS data editor program for processing.

## Results

- A total of 94 leprosy patients attending to the Skin Clinic of CNTH Ragama during the study period from 1st September to 31st August 2016. These patients clinically composed of 50% tuberculoid leprosy, 30.9% borderline leprosy, 14.9% Lepromatous leprosy and 4.2% of primary neuritic leprosy cases. Mean age of the cases was 43.5 years and male to female ratio was 1:1.
- Out of the total, 3.2% cases had not attended school, 23.4% had studied up to grade five, 54.3% had studied up to G.C.E. ordinary level and 18.1% had studied up to G.C.E. advanced level. Only 1.1% had completed higher education.
- With regard to awareness on leprosy, 85.1% patients had heard about leprosy. Mode of gaining knowledge was 40% from the media programs, 22.5% from posters displayed in public places, and 6.3% from educational programs. In addition

to the above patients had also gathered information from affected family members, society, and being residents close to the Leprosy Hospital.

- Out of the total only 40.4% patients knew that it is infectious. 6.4% knew it is caused by bacteria.
- 10.6% were aware of the mode of transmission as air borne or skin contact (5.3% each).
- 30.9% knew that leprosy could affect the skin. 41.5% were aware that leprosy causes disfigurement and deformities in digits.
- 53.2% answered that leprosy is treatable while 26.6% knew it needs long term follow up.
- 38.3% cases presented within six months of the symptoms.
- Patients who presented after six months were categorized as late presentations and further analyzed for reasons for late presentation. It revealed that 44.6% cases presented late due to poor awareness on the symptoms of the disease. Another 16% had sought medical advice at an early stage but the delay in diagnosing the disease has caused the late presentation to the Skin Clinic. 1.1% has presented late due to social stigma.

## Conclusion

Awareness of leprosy among newly diagnosed leprosy patients is at a satisfactory level of 85.1%. Publicity programs conducted via electronic and print media, poster campaigns and health educational programs conducted by the Health Ministry have contributed effectively to create awareness among the public. Even though 85.1% were aware of leprosy, 44.6% didn't know the exact symptoms of leprosy causing late presentation to a clinic. The 16% cases of delayed presentations due to delay in diagnosis appears to be a significant drawback. Specific reasons for late diagnosis should be identified in order to eliminate same.

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