***Title***

Factors influencing health care seeking behaviour of the people of Idrusi village – Mangochi

***Objectives and methodology***

Many factors influence health care seeking behaviour and exactly how they interact and influence the actions of people is often unique to a community. Our primary objective was to find out factors which influence health care seeking behaviour of people living in Idrusi Village T/A Jalasi. Specifically we wanted to assess knowledge of people on common illnesses, to find out factors which promote access to health care services as well as those that hinder access to health care services. We randomly selected households and conducted face to face interviews with the community members and key informants such as the village headwoman, Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) and members of village development committee for information and details regarding their activities in response to their health and ill-health.

***Results and discussion***

We found that the people have good knowledge of common illnesses as they were able to tell the symptoms of malaria, diarrhoea and even pneumonia.

The people in this village use Aba Health Centre. A number of factors were noted that promote access to health care services such as free services, disease confirmation, health promotion messages and referral services to the district hospital for serious conditions. This does not happen at traditional healers. Lastly, there is good community support. The village has a safe motherhood committee which support HSAs in identifying pregnant women and encouraging them to seek early antenatal care and hospital delivery. All these factors encourage people to seek healthcare services in the village.

There were also a number of reasons for poor health seeking behaviour. Firstly, the only clinician for the health facility is unavailable most of the times. On such days people wait all day and come back without any assistance. People lamented of long distance to the health facility, long waiting period, shortage of medicines, as some of the biggest problems for accessing health care services in the village. Consequently people end up seeking help from traditional healers or buy medicines from groceries. In other households, the decision to seek health care rests with the elderly people or husbands. Other women wait for their husbands for permission to attend hospital services and these husbands are mostly in South Africa. Lastly the attitude of health care providers is a major problem such as shouting at patients, not explaining clearly what is happening. An example was given of two incidences where young children died at the facility while waiting for the clinician who did not come on that day and he never communicated to anyone of his absence. All these factors contribute to poor health care seeking behaviour among the people of Idrusi Village.

***Conclusion and recommendation***

The community has good knowledge of common illnesses with a wide variety of factors influencing health seeking behaviour both positively and negatively. However there is general apathy which is developing to use health care services due to negative factors. We recommend lobbying for more health care providers and more health care facilities.