

COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAM ON CHRONIC RESPIRATORY DISEASES IN A HARD-TO-REACH AREA IN MANGOCHI, MALAWI



PATS Lung health Initiative (PALI) Award 2024 Report

Date : 8th October 2024

Venue : Masasa Village, Mangochi

Background

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) pose a growing health challenge in Malawi, where chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs) such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, bronchiectasis, and tuberculosis (TB) significantly impact adult populations. A recent analysis highlights an age-standardized mortality rate across four major NCDs (cardiovascular disease, CRDs, cancer, and diabetes) at 721 per 100,000 in males and 523 in females in 2021. Yet, primary healthcare facilities often lack adequate diagnostic resources for these conditions, as demonstrated by Banda et al., who found that only 4.6% of patients with respiratory symptoms had recorded diagnoses.

CRDs are exacerbated by factors such as biomass smoke exposure, childhood respiratory infections, malnutrition, and tobacco use. However, a general lack of awareness persists around these risk factors and strategies to mitigate them. Given that nearly all households (98%) rely on biomass fuel and approximately 12.1% of males smoke, there is an urgent need for community education on risk prevention and diagnostic resources for CRDs.

Aims

- Educate community members: Raise awareness of chronic respiratory conditions, risk factors, diagnosis, and treatment.
- Empower early detection: Equip participants with the knowledge to recognize symptoms and understand local diagnostic services.
- Encourage preventive solutions: Collaborate with community members to identify solutions for reducing preventable risk factors.
- Support symptomatic individuals: Provide tailored guidance and resource referrals for individuals already diagnosed with CRDs.

Event Summary

The one-day educational program was attended by a targeted group of community members from Masasa, a remote area in the district of Mangochi. Health care workers from the nearest health facility were also invited to participate. The program, led by Dr. Madalo Mukoka and Dr. Hussein Twabi, aimed to provide in-depth education on CRDs and foster engagement with health resources.

Key Activities

- Educational Sessions: Participants received detailed presentations on respiratory diseases, their causes, pathophysiology, and potential treatments. Specific attention was given to risk factors like biomass fuel exposure and smoking, with guidance on managing these.
- Symptom Recognition Training: Participants were trained to identify common CRD symptoms in themselves and children, encouraged to seek care, and informed of the health facilities available in Mangochi.
- Brainstorming Solutions: A collaborative session allowed community members to suggest and discuss potential low-cost interventions, such as improved ventilation to reduce biomass smoke exposure.
- Individual Consultations: For participants with pre-existing diagnoses, personalized consultations were provided to ensure they understood their condition and available support options.

Outcomes

- Increased awareness: Participants demonstrated an improved understanding of CRD risk factors and expressed an increased likelihood of seeking timely diagnosis.
- Enhanced health-seeking behavior: Community members reported a greater willingness to access healthcare services and seek higher-level care if necessary.
- Collaborative solutions: The community provided valuable input on sustainable, locally feasible interventions, creating a foundation for future community-driven initiatives.

Conclusion

The event successfully addressed the knowledge gaps around CRDs and inspired community-driven health engagement. By empowering the participants with knowledge and involving CHWs in ongoing support, the program lays groundwork for better CRD prevention and treatment outcomes.



