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NON AVAILABILITY OF ANTIEPILEPTIC MEDICATIONS

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” quoting Charles Dickens, I feel living in an era very similar to those times, with an ever widening gap between the different economical classes in our society. With the relative improvement in Health services across Pakistan may over the last 70 years and the absolute disastrous growth of 2.4% in population within the last decade, there is still a lot of disparity between the health care demand and supply for common man.¹

The burden of meeting the health problems primarily lies on the population itself. The picture gets grimmer with the conditions of economy, law and order situations, war of terror and geopolitical conditions of Pakistan.

State of the art institutions have sprung up in almost all major cities of Pakistan. All patients ranging from minor ailments to illnesses with dire consequences try to reach these set ups; the non-availability of basic health services being a strong reason for that. The uncertainty of the day to day life in our country has a heavy toll on this aspect as well, as the public sector institutes are unable to cater for the needs of our ever-growing population. The quality of services offered by the private hospitals in return of a heavy fee is not always optimal.

Medicines available in the market are of varying quality, original and fake both available in the market with identical packing and prices. Only using them would make one know if they are effective or not. Besides that every now and then essential medications are withdrawn from the market at the spur of the moment and patients are left desperate to find alternatives at a short notice

A similar scenario has been witnessed from time to time in the Pediatric neurology clinical services, where essential Anti-epileptic medications which form the backbone of Epilepsy treatment in Childhood Epilepsies are withdrawn from the market every now and then. Pediatric Epilepsies have a good outcome by 65-70%, leaving a 30-35% to carry it into adulthood.²⁻⁶ A false deficit is created and then medicines are reintroduced in the market with raised prices. This is a vicious cycle and in the past five years at least 4-5 such medicines have been removed from market causing immense emotional trauma for those who are taking these medicines in maintenance and resulted in break through seizure crises with disastrous outcomes.

A well-known brand of Valproate and Oxcarbamazepine, which are excellent broad spectrum anti-epileptic drugs written widely by pediatricians, has recently come in a fresh packing. A number of parents have reported using different colored syrup in the same packing which are totally different from the original colors. Incidence of breakthrough seizures have also increased with the different colors of the syrup in spite of increasing the doses.

Another interesting fact about all this is that the pediatric formulations disappear quicker than adult form of medications. Parents do rationing and when such an artificial deficit is created at that time four fold high price has also been paid to avoid total deficiency. Treatment of epilepsy in children is by tailoring medicines to the requirement of individuals according to age, gender, weight, number of medicines being administered and other existing co morbid conditions.

Summarizing it, the drug has effects on the body and body has effects on the drug. Using alternative medications when such false crisis are developed, is the only choice left for the neurologists and pediatricians who deal with the burden of epilepsy in children in a resource poor country like Pakistan. So the painstaking process of tailoring restarts with the disappearance of each anti-epileptic medicine, which takes quite some time for the adjustments to quantify. Such happenings as it appears will be the norm of our practices in the times to come. Can it be reduced by the higher control authorities by having specific price control codes which are implemented strictly? The uncertainty of the situation hangs ominously without any way out or hope of getting out of it.

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Farida Jan; concept, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review