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# Introduction of a new vaccine in EPI; what we can achieve from a programme in failure

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## Introduction of a New Vaccine in EPI; What We can Achieve from a Programme in Failure

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Sir,

Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) is unacceptably high in many countries of the world with pneumonia being one of the major killers in this group.<sup>1</sup> For preventing deaths from pneumonia, WHO has been suggesting these countries to introduce pneumococcal conjugate vaccine to reduce U5MR.<sup>1</sup> Logically, Pakistan is one of the most appropriate countries for the introduction of PCV into its Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) with high U5MR (89 deaths per thousand live births).<sup>2</sup> Realizing the potential role that PCV can play to U5MR, the government of Pakistan integrated PCV 10 within its EPI programme in October 2012 with an expectation to reduce the pneumonia related U5MR.<sup>3</sup>

It should be remembered that a well-functioning and efficiently performing immunization programme is one of the pre-requisite for the success of this new vaccine.<sup>4</sup> However, a quick review of the EPI programme in Pakistan shows that the overall immunization coverage is currently only 54%; indicating low performance and severe flaws in the existing immunization system.<sup>2</sup> Increased workload due to special campaigns to eradicate polio and frequent outbreaks of measles also indicate of the poor quality of immunization services.<sup>4</sup>

The major factors responsible for the low immunization coverage of Pakistan's EPI programme are poor planning resulting in inadequate number of fixed facilities and increased workload on outreach services, inadequate monitoring and supervision, insufficient human resources and lack of cold chain integrity.<sup>4</sup> Another factor that has badly affected the EPI performance is the flood in the past several years.<sup>5</sup> These floods have damaged the infrastructure of public health facilities which are the main source for vaccination. In addition, the floods also displaced the

trained vaccinators and interrupted the out-reach immunization services by damaging the roads.<sup>5</sup>

Within this context, where EPI has been already facing extensive service delivery challenges, inception of PCV 10 into routine immunization might fail to achieve expected reduction in U5MR. However, serious efforts are required to improve the quality of EPI services, improved skills or capacity of existing human resource and improved service utilization which are essential to achieve the desired outcomes. Moreover, adequate efforts must be directed towards awareness creation to enhance service utilization and enhanced uptake of PCV10 vaccine. Once the existing gaps are filled and loose ends tied, PCV10 is likely to achieve the target of reduced pneumonia related U5MR among children in Pakistan.

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