

Editorial

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Controlling Dengue: An uphill task?

Mosquito-borne dengue viral fever is one of the fastest spreading global health hazards of recent times. Although it has been widespread especially in the tropics, dengue came into prominence since the early 1950's following the epidemic in south East Asia. The commonest presentation of Dengue Fever is characterized by high fever, severe headaches, muscle pain and skin rash. This is the primary form and is less serious than the deadly secondary form referred to as Dengue hemorrhagic fever. The latter mainly affects most Asian and Latin American countries and has become a leading cause of hospitalization and death among children in these regions.¹ It is estimated that 390 million dengue infections occur per year of which about 25% present with clinical manifestations.²

Globalization, poorly planned urbanization and recent changes in weather patterns are believed to be the main factors for this high incidence. Links have already been identified between climate, various modes of transmission and diseases; with the strongest associations being between climate and mosquito-borne diseases.³

Rapid movements of population into urban and sub-urban areas combined with poor planning and limited resources have resulted in abundance of potential breeding sites. Primary prevention is going to be an uphill task. According to the WHO, the disease is now endemic in more than 100 countries with explosive outbreaks being observed and the disease spreading to newer areas. The social and economic impact on these countries due to this disease burden is immense.

The global trend of dengue fever is going to continue for several decades. It is believed that effective prevention controls may not affect the incidence and spread in the short term. There is a dire need for long-term commitment from relevant authorities to set-up a task force involving town planners, environmentalists, entomologists, epidemiologists, laboratory facilities with trained personnel and establish regional vector control programs to alleviate the disease burden. Development of vaccines has to be expedited. Despite the Malaysian government setting up a Dengue Task Force Committee in 2013, the implementation of some of the measures may be suboptimal, evident by the increase in Dengue

incidence in 2013 and 2014. The current enactments like Act 154- Destruction of Disease-Bearing Insects Act 1975 and the subsequent amendments to it may be inadequate to effectively prosecute the offenders. This is one of the main grievances of the enforcing officers. The authorities need to address this lapse to realize their ultimate goal.

Dengue is a major regional health issue with statistics showing an increase incidence of the disease in Malaysia. We thought it is appropriate to highlight this major health problem in this issue of our journal.

REFERENCES

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