

New challenges and opportunities in health and development in Africa

This year has brought with it new challenges and many opportunities for those working in health and development to make real change and impact. *African Health Sciences* has embraced these issues and brings you the most up to date information on health and development in Africa through seven original research articles and three practice point reviews. One major theme running through the current issue of *African Health Sciences* is reproductive and child health. However there is also a lot of interesting information for those interested in policy, surgery, dentistry and general medicine. Welcome!

Our leading research article comes from Morocco where vitamin A deficiency is a very serious issue despite the country being of middle income status. Nassri Issad¹ and colleagues describe very severe vitamin A deficiency in children and women in Morocco obtained by high liquid performance chromatography (HPLC), the method of choice for vitamin A analysis. Modification of their method by recycling the mobile phase has reduced the cost of HPLC making it feasible for epidemiological studies.

In their groundbreaking study on gestational diabetes mellitus in Mulago hospital Uganda, Odar² and colleagues document serious adverse maternal and foetal outcomes and call for regular screening to avert these effects. Vuhahula³, a Tanzanian histopathologist, has found the distribution of salivary gland tumours in Uganda very much different from what western textbooks tell us. For example she has found that females are more affected than males: food for thought?

In their study of street children in Eldoret in Kenya, Ayuku⁴ and colleagues remind us once again that western theories of temperament are at variance with observations in Africa. In fact they find that expression of good mood and friendliness to most people fits well with their dependence on strangers for donations and other favours. To maintain this temperament and style the children sniff glue and other drugs to cope with hunger, cold and hostility. A must read for you!

For those interested in policy issues, Karamagi⁵ and others give some evidence that support and supervision and praise of health

workers were associated with better counselling for mothers of children in health units. While malaria remains the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Uganda, Idro⁶ reports that the quality of care of children with severe malaria is still poor with over 50% of caretakers being asked to buy at least one essential resuscitation item from outside the hospital.

In her study of factors influencing choice of contraceptives among female undergraduates in Nigeria, Osemwenka⁷ reports that availability, cost, safety concerns, effectiveness, peer pressure, and convenience were the key issues. She adds to the growing list of voices calling for involvement of men in reproductive health and family planning.

The rest of this issue of *African Health Science* brings you practice points on the current treatment of fissure in ano⁸, Moyer's method of dental analysis⁹ and a discussion of gender inequality and domestic violence¹⁰ in the face of the HIV pandemic.

We thank you very much for your continued support and wish very good reading!

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Kampala, April 2004.

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