

Senators call for monitoring of health projects

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD, April 10: There is a need for well-organized and well-planned monitoring of various health programmes launched at national level.

This was stated by Senator Abudl Razak Thahim during a meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Health here on Thursday. During the meeting it was observed that a comprehensive monitoring would help improve the health standards and would help in providing basic health facilities at the lower level.

The committee noted with concern that despite efforts, the hepatitis B and C were on the rise and the medicines were much expensive. They were of the opinion that more focused approach was required to control the communicable diseases like hepatitis, TB, HIV/Aids, etc.

Members also stressed for creating more awareness of the communicable diseases. Senators demanded that a comprehensive and update health police should be introduced as soon as possible and priorities should be fixed as

it would not only help in providing relief to the common man but would also help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the long run.

The committee gave responsibility to Prof Sajid Mir to identify the area, which need immediate attention so that the committee may prepare its plan of action and give its input to improve those aspects in health sector which remained neglected during the past. Members were surprised to know the Pakistan lags behind as far as MDGs were concerned. They suggested that drastic measures were required to achieve those goals.

Earlier, federal secretary for health Khusnood Akhtar Lashari, gave a detailed presentation on the working and performance of the ministry and its attached departments and the efforts made to improve the health of the people. He informed that the number of doctors and nurses was less than the required which is creating problems in the hospitals and other health centers. He also informed

the committee about the silent features of the national health policy 2001 and said that the policy was being updated and efforts were being made to bridge the gaps. He gave detailed figures of the allocations made for health during last three years. Mr Lashari said the network of lady health-workers was being strengthened at the rural level to provide basic health facilities to women in the far flung areas.

The health secretary also briefed the committee about various programmes launched at national level.

Senior officials of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Centre, Karachi, National Institute of Child Health Karachi and Federal Government Services Hospital also apprised the committee about the problems being faced by these institutes.

The meeting was attended by Senators Razina Alam Khan, Dr Abdul Khaliq Prizada, Dr Kauser Firdaus, Abdul Rashid and Prof Sajid Mir, along with senior officials of health ministry.

Nursing Council Act to be amended

Islamabad

Important amendments are being made in the Pakistan Nursing Council Act to give due importance to nurses, paramedics and health technicians in the proposed legislation.

According to official sources, necessary changes in the Act may be finalised by the committee within two weeks.

They said it was decided that the highly trained nurses who complete their specialisation diplomas and post-graduation will receive due places in the recruit-

ment and promoting rules.

The Ministry of Health has also decided that matters related to nursing sector in the federal government will be placed under an upgraded unit headed by a competent Nursing Advisor. Besides, the ministry will ensure appointment of experienced nurses in teaching hospitals, official sources said.

They said around new posts of nursing staff will be created over the present and next financial years to provide employment to nursing students passing the ex-

aminations. The decision was made taking notice of unemployment in the nursing sector, sources added.

They said taking note of the president's directive to provide scholarships in the nursing sector it has been decided to move a bill to the Finance Division for implementation of this directive.

Similarly, considering the complaints that nursing students

are not receiving sufficient opportunities of actual delivery cases in labour rooms the ministry has decided to look



'Health facilities to be ensured'

By Our Reporter

ISLAMABAD, May 3: Federal Minister for Health, Information and Broadcasting Sherry Rehman has said the government was committed to providing free health facilities to all.

Talking to a delegation of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) on Saturday, she said the government was taking all steps to provide better health facilities to the masses and in this regard requisite laws would be made to ensure sustainability of the facilities.

"Delivery of health facilities free of cost and of better quality is the commitment of the present

government with the people and no delay in this regard will be tolerated".

She directed that the curriculum of medical colleges should be revised urgently and condition of the public hospitals should be improved.

The PMDC delegation briefed the minister about the ambit of responsibilities of the council and the services rendered by it.

The minister appreciated the role of PMDC in ensuring quality in medical institutions and expressed the hope that it will continue its meritorious services.

21,000 die of measles annually

Dawn

20/3/08

21,000 die of measles annually

ISLAMABAD, March 19: A one-year effort to immunise 64 million children in Pakistan against measles, the largest public health campaign of its kind in the world, has been kicked off on Monday.

This is the world's largest mass measles campaign ever undertaken," Melissa Corkum, a spokeswoman for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), was quoted as saying by IRIN, the UN information unit.

The fifth and final phase of the campaign targeting 34 million children between nine months and under 13 years of age in Pakistan's populous Punjab Province and Islamabad began on 17 March and will conclude on April 3.

Over 19,000 skilled and 45,000 semi-skilled persons are engaged in the mammoth campaign overseen by 3,700 supervisors.

Unlike the house-to-house strategy employed in the country's ongoing polio eradication drive, the children are immu-

nised in schools, health facilities, hospitals and outreach centres.

"Unlike polio campaigns, if every child receives this injection, there is no need to continue these mass campaigns," Corkum said.

Since March 2007, 30 million children have been immunised in 99 districts throughout the country, including Balochistan, Sindh, North West Frontier Province, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Pakistani-administered Kashmir and the country's Federally Administered Northern Areas.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over one million cases of measles and 21,000 measles-associated deaths occur annually in Pakistan.

"This means that 58 children die every day in Pakistan from measles and the associated complications," Corkum noted, adding that by vaccinating "we have the ability, the opportunity, and most importantly now we

have the responsibility, to protect the children of Pakistan from measles."

This is no easy task, with continued community mobilisation still needed to ensure every child is immunised against measles and other preventable diseases.

"Every segment of the community, including opinion leaders, religious leaders, teachers, health workers - including lady health workers - must be fully working in partnership to ensure no child is missed during this one-time campaign," the UNICEF official stressed.

"A missed child is an at risk child, so parents should ensure their child receives the immunisation even if they have been immunised before or have had measles," she said.

As part of the campaign in Pakistan, UNICEF and WHO are providing technical assistance to the government to reduce childhood morbidity and mortality caused by measles.—PPI

Dawn 3/20/08

2 NATIONAL

Health officials up in arms over latest polio case

By Mukhtar Alam

KARACHI, March 23: The fresh detection of a polio case in a 16-month old boy in Shikarpur district has upset the immunisation campaigners and others associated with the programme, said sources privy to the expanded immunisation programme.

The bigwigs at the helm of affairs of the polio-drop administration programme considered the detection of three polio cases during the first three months of the year a rebirth of the polio virus, which, according to them, had almost been eliminated in the province.

"Now, the concern is how the huge funding behind at least 72 rounds of oral polio drops since 1994 and the services of thousands of national vaccinators and polio workers under the supervision of national health officials and representatives of international donors and health agencies will be justified," said a source.

According to a senior health official, despite a long journey and efforts including a good number of foreign trips in the name of study tours and interactions with other counterparts and important meetings, zero reporting of polio cases still remains a distant goal.

In 2005, a total of five polio cases were found in Sindh, while 12 cases were confirmed for 2006, including four at Karachi, two at Sukkur and one each at Naushehro Feroze, Umerkot, Ghotki, Jacobabad, Shikarpur and Sanghar.

Twelve cases were also discovered in 2007. The cases were discovered in Karachi (2), Khairpur (1), Thatta (1), Jacobabad (2), Ghotki (1) and Kambar (5).

Now, Hyderabad, Nawabshah and Shikarpur have also entered the list of high-risk districts in the province as they reported one polio case each during 2008 so far, while other districts outside Sindh are currently zero reporters.

At an Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) review meeting held on Saturday (March 22) at Karachi, it was stressed that the high-risk population - specially the nomadic population - should be focused

on more, while communication and advocacy activities should be intensified and enhancement of routine immunisation as a top priority be ensured.

Some of the participants were of the view that the report of fresh cases in Sindh was indicative of an improved surveillance system, while the number of cases from the NWFP, which was at a higher risk of transmission of the virus from Afghanistan, had been zero as the immunisation and surveillance teams were not getting time to conduct meaningful activities due to the militant uprising there.

The National Programme Manager of the EPI, Dr H.B. Memon, told *Dawn* that Sindh, after the detection of the Shikarpur case, was launching a three-day mopping up campaign in the whole of Shikarpur, Larkana and Kambar districts, while partial mopping up would be done in Sukkur, Jacobabad and Khairpur districts. He said that about 1,040,354 children up to the age of five years would be administered oral polio vaccines in 176 union councils during the campaign.

"Changes of executive district officers (health) from time to time also hampers the anti-polio drive as the newcomers had to reset the strategies and unify the field workers, which surely needed some time for a positive orientation," Dr Memon said while commenting on the failures of the EPI initiative in Sindh.

Campaign review needed

However, a couple of others at the helm of affairs expressed the view that there was a need to review the whole vaccination exercise, particularly at a time when the province was so near to giving a final push against the dreaded polio virus.

"We need logistical support, budget for vaccination activities, transport to reach the non-accessible areas and enhancement in POL charges as well," said an official coming from the interior of Sindh.

"The high risk months of August to November are still

ahead," said another insider, stressing that it was high time for the international health agencies and donor bodies as well to revisit their strategies in regard to monitoring and technical management and also assess the output of experts and related manpower deployed in the country.

Pleasure trips?

A depressed official went on to say that trips of personnel of the health department and immunisation projects under the garb of polio or measles campaigns should also be stopped forthwith, even to the capital or other provinces as these did not help in any way.

"The EDOs of health and other staffers are also called for meetings at one place almost every month, some time ahead of the polio campaigns or during the campaigns, which also hindered other health-related activities and caused a lack of concentration in campaigns and follow-up activities," said a district health official, who suggested reducing such meetings and ceremonies.

Another official said that at a time when the vaccine coverage was being extended to 90 to 95 per cent of the deserving population of children in line with the international standard, an exercise to know the quality of vaccines and performance of cold-chains at various stages could also be undertaken.

However, there are quarters which believed that even the coverage rate of 95 per cent was also not a major achievement.

It was learnt through a source that national immunisation managers from Islamabad in July last year - when only four polio cases had been reported in Sindh and the progress was being appreciated - had pointed out to the EPI Sindh project director that there were still some key issues that needed to be addressed before the next polio campaign.

Another key issue that needed to be addressed was the marking of the fingers of children after giving polio drops.