

Comment on: “Pharmacovigilance in the Middle East”

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Dear Editor,

I enjoyed reading the article entitled “Pharmacovigilance in the Middle East: A Survey of 13 Arabic-Speaking Countries”, which was recently published in *Drug Safety* [1]. The author stated that “Six countries possess formal national pharmacovigilance programmes (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [KSA], Oman and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]), while five (Bahrain, Kuwait, Palestine, Qatar and Yemen) reported no active programme or designated centre” [1]. In this letter I would like to update readers on the information regarding pharmacovigilance in Yemen. The Yemeni Pharmacovigilance Center (YPVC) was established in early 2011 in the capital Sana’a, with the following objectives: early detection of adverse drug reactions (ADRs); detection of increase in frequency of (known) adverse reactions; identification of risk factors and possible mechanisms underlying adverse reactions; estimation of quantitative aspects of benefit/risk analysis and dissemination of information needed to improve drug prescribing and regulation; prevention of ADRs; drug quality surveillance; encouraging rational and safe use of drugs; and communication with international institutions working in pharmacovigilance [2]. To achieve its objectives, the YPVC has visited many hospitals (Government and private) and pharmacies (Government and private) with the purpose of increasing their awareness towards ADR detection, ADR assessment, ADR reporting and quality of medicines. The YPVC has published reports on ADRs and on the quality of pharmaceutical products (in

English for healthcare professionals and in Arabic for the general public) [3].

Pharmacovigilance in Yemen has faced many challenges since the introduction of the YPVC in early 2011.

Based on findings from the literature, pharmacovigilance in Yemen is no different from other developing countries in terms of pharmacovigilance challenges. However, below are some challenges and practical recommendations from the literature [4, 5] which can lead to improving the pharmacovigilance center in Yemen and lead to better outcomes in both patient care and for policy makers.

- Lack of staff in the pharmacovigilance center in Yemen. To activate the pharmacovigilance role and activities in Yemen. Hiring more trained staff is necessary to improve the services of the pharmacovigilance center in Yemen.
- Lack of awareness among healthcare professionals regarding the pharmacovigilance center and its role, and how they can report ADRs and other activities of medication safety. Marketing the role and activities of the pharmacovigilance center through media, workshops, general lectures, brochures and distribution of educational material is needed to increase the awareness of healthcare professionals.
- Introducing pharmacovigilance concepts is very important to pharmacy, and all medical education, to improve pharmacovigilance in Yemen.
- Lack of time among healthcare professionals. Motivation is the key to overcome this challenge.
- Counterfeit medicines in Yemen are a major problem. Steps need to be taken to increase awareness on the part of pharmacists, healthcare professionals, and the public about the dangers and potentially bad outcomes from

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using these counterfeit medicines. Also, it is important to fight counterfeit medicines by actively punishing pharmacies selling counterfeit medicines as well as those smuggling medicines or facilitating entry into Yemen.

- Lack of awareness among patients regarding the pharmacovigilance center, its role, and how they can report ADRs and other issues related to medication safety. Marketing the role and activities of the pharmacovigilance center through media, general lectures, brochures and distribution of educational material is very important to increase the awareness of healthcare professionals.
- Lack of research about different issues of pharmacovigilance in Yemen. Support from the MoPH&P (Ministry of Public Health and Population), universities and policy makers can overcome this challenge.
- Lack of experience regarding pharmacovigilance issues in Yemen resulted in the pharmacovigilance center being established in early 2011. Training staff and healthcare professionals and sharing experience with neighboring countries by conducting annual regional conferences can overcome this challenge.

- Establishing hospital reporting programmes is needed to improve ADR reporting among healthcare professionals.

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