

Barriers to Accessing Internationally Controlled Essential Medicines in Uganda: A Qualitative Study

Gaby Isabelle Ooms, Paul Klatser, Hendrika A. van den Ham, Tim Reed | 2019
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Abstract

Context: Access to [internationally controlled essential medicines](#) is a problem worldwide. More than five billion people cannot access opioids for pain and palliative care or do not have access to surgical care or anesthetics, 25 million people living with epilepsy do not have access to their medicines, and 120,000 women die annually owing to postpartum hemorrhage. In Uganda, access to controlled medicines is also problematic, but a lack of data on factors that influence access exists. Objectives: The objective of this study was to identify the social, cultural, and regulatory barriers that influence access to internationally controlled essential medicines in Uganda. Methods: Semistructured interviews with 15 key stakeholders with knowledge on controlled medicines from relevant institutions in Uganda. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the Access to Medicines from a Health System Perspective framework. Results: Barriers in accessing controlled medicines were experienced owing to lack of prioritization, difficulties in finding the balance between access and control, deficiencies in the workings of the estimate and distribution system, lack of knowledge, inadequate human resources, expenses related to use and access, and stigma. It was believed that some abuse of specific controlled medicines occurred. Conclusion: The findings of this research indicate that to improve access to internationally controlled essential medicines in Uganda, health system strengthening is needed on multiple fronts. Active engagement and concerted efforts are needed from all stakeholders to ensure access and prevent abuse.

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