Background

Asthma patients in high-income countries (HIC) and low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) need uninterrupted supplies of affordable, quality-assured essential medicines. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the importance of ensuring that essential medicines are on Essential Medicines Lists (EML) and National Reimbursement Lists (NRL). The WHO Essential Medicine List (EML) is on a country’s EML if the country has an EML and a NRL. Progress should be monitored and evaluated to ensure essential asthma medicines figure on their own EML and NRL, and many are not providing them free or subsidised for patients, especially in LMICs. This situation is detrimental for patient access to medicines and is likely to be perpetuating the under-prescription and underuse of ICSs.

Hypothesis

That in many countries essential asthma medicines are not on the country EML or NRL

Aim

To determine a) how many countries have the essential asthma medicines on their EML and NRL; b) which WHO essential asthma medicines are included on the lists

Methods

A cross-sectional email survey of GAN centres was carried out between 2013 and 2014. The survey was sent to GAN principal investigators in 72 centres in 120 countries, 41 were high-income countries (HICs) and 79 LMICs.

Results

The WHO Essential Medicine List included 1 or more ICS in 72 (79%) of the LMICs and 80 (72%) of the HIC. Of the 28 (33%) countries in HIC with an EML, 29 (79%) included 1 or more ICS: beclometasone 50 µg and 100µg, and salbutamol 100µg. Of the 79 (72%) countries in LMICs with EML, 64 (81%) included 1 or more ICS: beclometasone 50 µg and 100µg, and salbutamol 100µg. Of 20 (25%) countries with an EML, 16 (70%) had beclometasone 50µg and 17 (74%) 100µg, and 29 (84%) of LMICs with EML included 1 or more ICS in HIC but only 20 (43%) in LMIC. Of 24 (30%) countries with an EML, 22 (92%) had beclometasone 50µg and 100µg, and 20 (83%) of LMICs with EML had beclometasone 50µg and 100µg. Of 32 (94%) of the HIC and 32 (70%) of the LMIC, beclometasone 50µg and 100µg was on the NRL in 79 (82%) of HIC and 80 (72%) of the LMIC.

Of 80 (72%) countries that had an NRL, 64 (80) included 1 or more ICS: beclometasone 50µg and 100µg, and salbutamol 100µg. Of 32 (94%) of the HIC and 32 (70%) of the LMIC, beclometasone 50µg and 100µg was on the NRL in 28 (82%) HIC but in only 20 (43%) LMIC. Of 24 (30%) countries with an EML, 20 (83%) had beclometasone 50µg and 100µg, and salbutamol 100µg, was on the NRL in 32 (94%) of HIC and 37 (80%) of LMICs. Countries with an ICS did not include any ICS and salbutamol were in 31 (91%) HIC, and 31 (87%) LMICs, the most poorly served. 15 (22%) of LMICs with an EML still do not include any ICS, and 14 (30%) of those with an NRL do not include any ICS.

Discussion

One step towards the WHO 80% availability target for NCD essential medicines will be for countries to ensure essential asthma medicines figure on their own EML and NRL. Progress should be monitored and evaluated at a national and international level. These are crucial first steps towards making essential asthma medicines available, quality-assured, and affordable for all.

Selected References