

Pharmaceutical human resources in church health services in Africa

The Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network takes on the challenge of filling the quality and quantity gaps

Medicines are essential tools for the treatment, prophylaxis or diagnosis in medicine. Qualified personnel is a key pillar of health systems. The WHO World Health Report 2006 reflected the shortages in personnel in the medical field in sub-Saharan Africa. The Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN) together with some of its members performed a survey to characterise the human resource situation of the pharmaceutical services in church facilities in seven countries between 2008 and 2010. The significant number of pharmacy staff lacking any pharmaceutical education, as was observed through the studies, lead to an elaboration of a twelve weeks training course. After a pilot course in 2011, several courses are conducted in 2012 covering different African regions.

Foto EPN



The Survey in eight African Countries

Methodology

The survey was performed using questionnaires. Information was gathered about training and practice of each staff working in the pharmacy department and general information about the institution itself. Physical visits from data collectors as well as submissions from responders by mail services were used.

Results

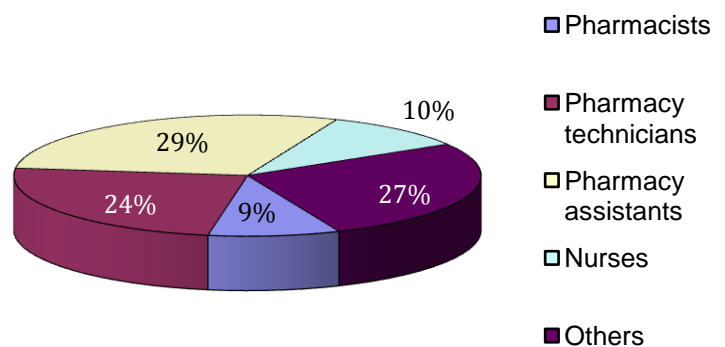
The survey comprised 332 facilities (70% hospitals, 28% health facilities, and 2% dispensaries) with 1009 respondents working in these health facilities. 70% of the health institutions included in the survey were situated in rural areas and only 30% urban. The gender distribution

amounted to 52% female personnel in pharmaceutical services.

Qualification

The staff of the pharmacies consisted of 9% pharmacists, 24% pharmaceutical technicians, 29% pharmaceutical assistants, 10% nurses, and 27% attendants. A low figure of pharmacists in the health care workforce of a country, e.g. Chad < 0.6 per 10.000 population, is reflected by no pharmacist being available in the surveyed health institutions. In Ghana, more than 70% of the hospital pharmacies were run by pharmacists. As an indicator to ensure quality, we found 72% of all staffs being evaluated on the job.

Figure 1: Overall qualifications of the respondents



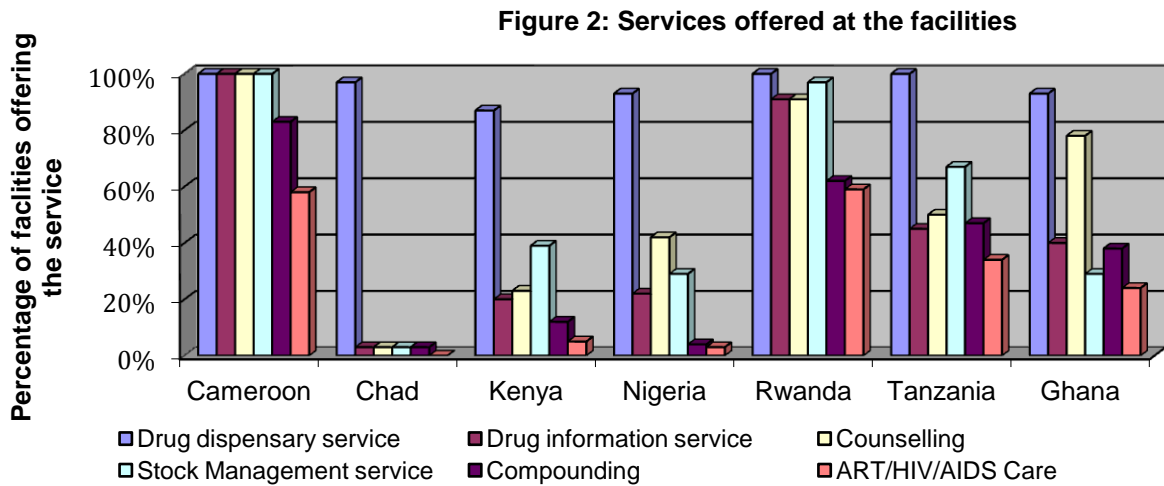
Services

Figure 2 shows the big differences of services offered. Looking at the results of the qualifications of the staff, a direct correlation to pharmaceutical qualification can be drawn. In Chad, the surveyed staff had no formal pharmaceutical

qualification. Besides dispensing, only 3% of other services were offered. In Tanzania, 62% of the staff was pharmaceutically trained. They were offering between 45 and 67% additional pharmaceutical services, e.g. drug information, counselling. Ghana with 68% of pharmaceutically qualified staff offered

additional pharmaceutical services between 24 and 78%. In order to improve the services offered by the pharmaceutical institutions within the health facility, more

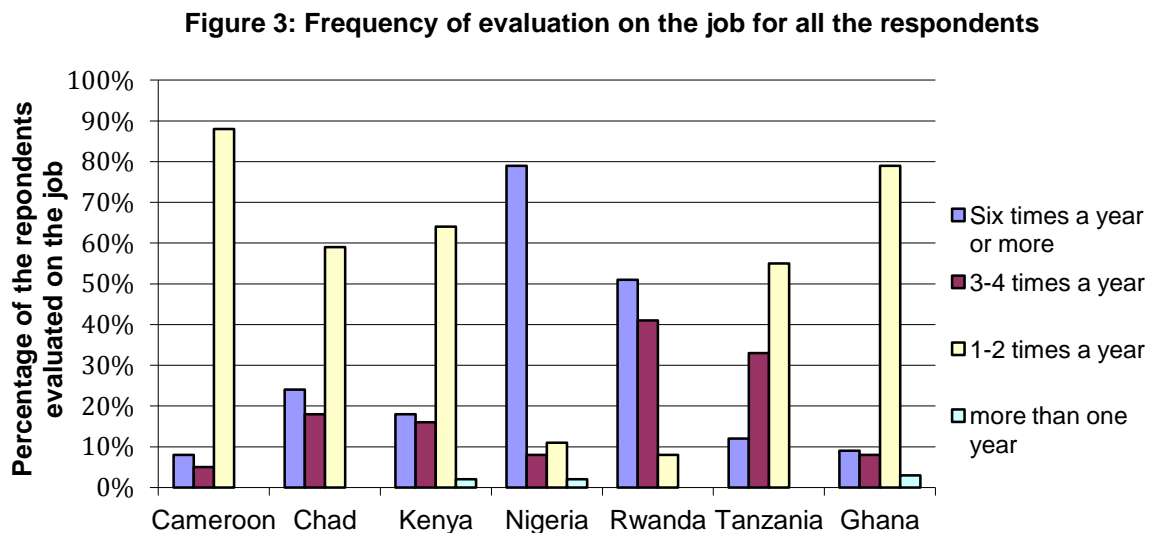
personnel should be pharmaceutically qualified. An overview of the services offered at the facilities is presented in figure 2.



Evaluation

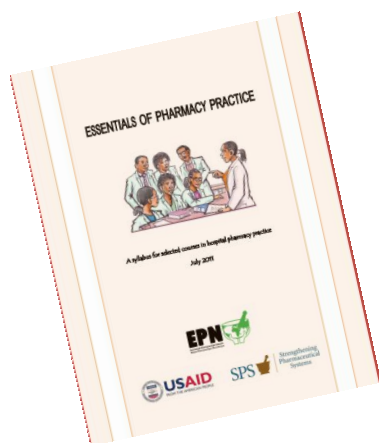
Supervision (peer reviewed audits) and evaluation of the staff is an important element of quality of service delivery (Black and Gruen, 2005). Since pharma-

ceutical personnel is limited as such, also the supervision has its limitations. Figure 3 shows the frequency of evaluation on the job.



EPN Improvement Initiative

Church facilities need to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements by employing staff with appropriate training and staff. Additionally, continuous pharmaceutical education is necessary to keep a standard of quality of the pharmaceutical services provided by the institutions.



EPN (Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network) is an independent, non profit Christian organization that works to support churches and church health systems (faith-based organizations) in over 30 countries. Its only office is in Kenya. EPN has developed a syllabus for selected courses in hospital pharmacy practice.

Course contents: Focus on essentials of pharmacy practice

The following main subjects are the pillars of the course content: pharmacy and health care, fundamentals of pharmaceuticals, medicines supply management, basic therapeutics, rational medicines use and dispensing, and hospital pharmacy practice.

In 2011, the first course was held in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2012, the courses started in Francophone and Anglophone countries. The participants come from different countries where training resources are scarce. This initiative does not relieve relevant authorities of their responsibilities to provide for education of pharmaceutical professionals. However, EPN supports its members in more than 20 countries to improve their pharmaceutical services.

References:

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More literature available from EPN



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