

Leprosy elimination campaign, Amazonas–Brazil 1997

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Summary A leprosy elimination campaign (LEC) was carried out in 15 endemic areas of Amazonas State, Brazil, in 1997. The LEC concentrated effort to detect leprosy cases during a multi-vaccination national campaign for serious public health problems other than leprosy, such as polio, diphtheria, hepatitis, measles, etc. The national campaign involved intensive population mobilization, giving a valuable opportunity to examine people for leprosy. The LEC personnel included 2964 individuals (municipal and state health workers and community volunteers), distributed in 688 health units and 53 reference health centres. As a result of the LEC, 74,814 person-to-person communications in the community were given; 10,297 clinical skin examinations were conducted, and 40 new leprosy cases were detected on the day of the campaign in urban areas of the municipalities. This total was low, compared to results in other states of Brazil, possibly due to the development of health education activities and regular community services in the state of Amazonas since 1987 and to the early implementation of WHO multiple drug therapy (MDT) from 1982 onwards. Despite the fact that the LEC was carried out only in the urban areas of the municipalities, the finding of no cases of leprosy in 7 out of 15 of them was surprising and may indicate that the prevalence of hidden cases of leprosy is not all that high, at least in these areas of the Amazonas State.

Introduction

Leprosy is still endemic in the Amazonas State of Brazil, with a prevalence rate of 12.9 per 10,000 inhabitants, in 1998.¹ The Fundação Alfredo da Matta (FUAM) is responsible for leprosy control in the State and a reference centre for skin diseases. According to the World

Health Organization, about a quarter of leprosy cases in endemic regions do not have access to diagnosis and treatment.³ The lack of awareness about the first signs and symptoms of leprosy by the community and health workers greatly hampers the early diagnosis and therefore delays its control process.² Finding untreated cases in the community and curing the detected cases are the two key activities for the global strategy for eliminating leprosy as a public health problem.³ A major component of the WHO strategy to detect and treat hidden cases is a campaign approach referred to as the leprosy elimination campaign (LEC). In 1997, the FUAM developed a multi-media campaign to increase population awareness of the first signs of leprosy and enable locally available health services to increase detection and treatment of self-reporting leprosy cases, to inform the general public of modern concepts related to the cure of leprosy and to implement leprosy control measures in local health units where they had not been previously available.

Materials and methods

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

All health and community facilities in the urban areas of the 15 municipalities of the Amazonas State including the capital city, Manaus, were involved.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Two months of mass communication via TV, radio, newspapers and other forms of community media were used to inform the population about leprosy symptoms and local health services. FUAM sponsored seminars were held to increase awareness of leprosy among community leaders and health workers. In addition, indirect active case finding through person-to-person communication was carried out in the community.

The LEC concentrated efforts to locate leprosy cases in endemic areas during a national multi-vaccination campaign. This campaign involved intensive population mobilization to eliminate serious public health problems other than leprosy, such as polio, diphtheria, hepatitis, measles etc. The leprosy campaign made use of this large population mobilization to reach a significant part. They came to the local health units during the national campaign. The campaign personnel included 2964 individuals (FUAM, municipalities and state health workers and community volunteers) distributed in 688 health units and 53 reference health centres.

Results and discussion

As a result of LEC, 74,814 person-to-person communications in the community were given; 10,297 clinical skin examinations conducted; and 40 new leprosy cases detected. As shown in Table 1, the total number of single lesion leprosy cases was 15 (37.5%) and three (7.5%) cases were under 15 years old. Regarding disability grade, four (10%) patients were detected with visible deformity or damage. Single lesion PB cases living in Manaus (66.7%) were treated with a single dose of ROM (rifampicin, ofloxacin and minocycline). The remaining patients were treated with standard WHO multiple drug therapy (MDT).

Table 1. Leprosy elimination campaign, Amazon, Brazil, October 25, 1997. New cases detected

Municipality	Population	New cases		Total	Number of lesions			Not informed	Disability grade			Age	
		PB	MB		1	2-5	+5		0	1	2	<15	>15
Manaus	1,193,727	17	04	21	10	04	01	02	17	02	02	01	20
Manacapuru	67,598	02		02		01		01	02				02
Nova O. do Norte	19,375		02	02					02				02
Itacoatiara	66,939	01	01	02					01		01		02
Humaitá	24,418	03		03		03			01	01	01		03
Manicoré*	36,110												
Borba	25,550	07		07	04	03			07			02	05
Tefé*	64,546												
Coari*	57,232												
Jutai*	20,414												
Lábrea	26,354		01	01					01				01
Boca do Acre*	23,426												
Eirunepé*	26,943												
Carauri	21,335	01	01	02	01				02				02
Parintins*	74,814												
Total	1,748,781	31	09	40	15	11	01	03	33	03	03	03	37

*No cases were detected during LEC

Conclusion

Awareness was increased about leprosy symptoms in the community and knowledge about local health facilities and services available for leprosy treatment was greatly improved. Hidden cases were detected in target areas. The LEC benefited greatly from coupling with the larger national multi-vaccination campaign. The total of cases detected was low, possibly due to the development of health education and community surveys in this state since 1987 and our early implementation of MDT from 1982 onwards. Nevertheless, the complete absence of any cases of leprosy in seven out of 15 of the municipalities was surprising, and may indicate that the prevalence of hidden cases is not all that high, at least in these areas of the Amazonas State.

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