

Pharmacists in Primary Healthcare: Integration of Pharmacy Services into Aboriginal Communities

By: Mr. Mohd Shah Rezan bin Hamzah

Klinik Kesihatan Jenjarom, PKD Kuala Langat

Graduate of Master in Pharmacy Practice 2022/2023, Faculty of Pharmacy UiTM

Integrating pharmacy services into Aboriginal communities has been transformative in the Kuala Langat District, particularly through implementing **mobile clinic services**. These clinics serve 11 aboriginal villages, including;



*KOA – Kampung Orang Asli

Aboriginal people frequently face obstacles that prevent them from receiving primary health care, such as the high-cost expense of medical care, personal accounts of racism and discrimination, and inadequate communication with healthcare professionals [1]. Tailoring services to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal communities or managing and owning them themselves improves the accessibility of primary health care [2]. The Kuala Langat District Health Office's mobile clinic service, staffed by medical officers, pharmacists, medical assistants, and healthcare assistants, navigates the challenging terrain of socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical barriers to deliver essential healthcare directly to remote areas. Therefore, this initiative addresses significant health inequalities prevalent among Aboriginal communities, where poverty, cultural beliefs, and geographic isolation hinder access to healthcare.

Socioeconomic disparities play a profound role in the health outcomes of Aboriginal communities. Generally, many of them struggle below the poverty line, unable to afford essential healthcare services and medications. This financial strain not only exacerbates existing health conditions but also prevents timely access to necessary treatments. Additionally, limited education and literacy levels within these communities hinder understanding healthcare information and navigating complex healthcare systems effectively.

Cultural beliefs and practices deeply rooted in Aboriginal communities further influence healthcare behaviours. Traditional healing methods and natural remedies are often favoured over conventional medicine, resulting in delays in seeking professional medical advice [3]. Moreover, historical injustices and negative experiences with healthcare providers have led to a pervasive mistrust of mainstream healthcare systems. This mistrust contributes to a reluctance to engage with healthcare services, perpetuating health disparities among Aboriginal populations.

Geographical isolation compounds these challenges, with many communities situated in remote areas far from urban centres where healthcare facilities are concentrated. The lack of reliable transportation infrastructure further complicates access to healthcare, making routine medical care and emergency services difficult to reach. This isolation not only impacts the management of chronic conditions but also increases the risk of serious health emergencies going untreated.

Mobile clinic services have emerged as a pivotal solution to these multifaceted barriers. By bringing healthcare directly to Aboriginal communities, these mobile units bridge the gap created by socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical challenges [4]. Pharmacists within these mobile clinics play a crucial role in ensuring the quality use of medicines. They not only dispense medications but also educate community members about proper medication use, potential side effects, and the importance of adherence to treatment plans. Additionally, pharmacists are essential in medication management, ensuring that all prescribed medications are appropriate for the patient's condition and are taken with the correct timing, dose, and instructions, thus enhancing treatment safety and effectiveness.

A key aspect of the pharmacist's role is to counter-check prescriptions made by medical officers, ensuring that each medication is appropriate and safe for the patient's condition. This practice enhances treatment safety and effectiveness, addressing concerns about overprescribing and misuse of medications. Furthermore, pharmacists engage in health education initiatives tailored to community needs, promoting health literacy and empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health.

The integration of pharmacy services into mobile clinics not only addresses immediate healthcare needs but also fosters a deeper understanding and trust in medical treatments within Aboriginal communities. By delivering comprehensive healthcare directly to those in need, mobile clinic services improve health outcomes, reduce disparities, and promote overall community well-being [5]. This holistic approach not only enhances access to healthcare but also strengthens community resilience by ensuring equitable access to essential services.

In conclusion, the integration of pharmacy services into mobile clinics represents a significant step towards addressing health inequalities among Aboriginal communities in Kuala Langat. By overcoming barriers of poverty, cultural beliefs, and geographic isolation, these mobile units ensure that healthcare is accessible and tailored to community needs. Through collaborative efforts of pharmacists, medical officers, and medical assistants, these initiatives not only provide essential medical care but also empower communities to take charge of their health. As these services continue to expand and evolve, they hold promise for creating lasting improvements in health outcomes and quality of life for Aboriginal populations in remote areas.



References:

1. Aspin, C., Brown, N., Jowsey, T., Yen, L., & Leeder, S. (2012). Strategic approaches to enhanced health service delivery for aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with chronic illness: A qualitative study. *BMC Health Services Research*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-12-143>
2. Hayman, N. (2010). Strategies to improve indigenous access for urban and regional populations to health services. *Heart Lung and Circulation*, 19(5-6), 367-371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hlc.2010.02.014>
3. Marques, B., Freeman, C., & Carter, L. (2022). Adapting traditional healing values and beliefs into therapeutic cultural environments for health and well-being. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010426>
4. Malone, N. C., Williams, M. M., Smith Fawzi, M. C., Bennet, J., Hill, C., Katz, J. N., & Oriol, N. E. (2020). Mobile health clinics in the United States. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-1135-7>
5. Singh, S., Baig, F., & Singh, S. (2022). Mobile Health Clinics as a healthcare delivery model to address community disparities. *Kansas Journal of Medicine*, 15(2), 259-261. <https://doi.org/10.17161/kjm.vol15.16543>

PRESCRIPTION

LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE FACULTY OF PHARMACY



Editorial Advisor:

Prof. Dato' Dr. Abu Bakar Abdul Majeed

Authors:

Associate Prof. Dr. Nor Amlizan binti Ramli, Dr. Nur Syamimi Ariffin, Mdm. Nur Syazwani Taridi, Dr. Gurmeet Kaur Surindar Singh, Mdm. Nik Ateerah Rasheeda Mohd Rocky, Dr. Aisyah Hasyila Jahidin, Ms. Zakiah Mohd Noordin, Dr. Fazleen Haslinda Mohd Hatta, Ms. Nurul Alyaa Ibrahim, Dr. Mohd Nazri Mohd Najib, Dr. Maziana Mahamood, Mr. Mohd Shah Rezan bin Hamzah, Prof. Dr. Mizaton Hazizul Hassan, Dr. Nur Suraya Adina Suratman

Editors:


Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mahmathi Karuppanan
Dr. Gurmeet Kaur Surindar Singh

Illustrator:


Mdm. Nurul Izzati Ismail

PRESCRIPTION


Faculty of Pharmacy,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Kampus Puncak Alam,
42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor.

 @pharmacyuitm




 @pharmacy_uitm




 Faculty of Pharmacy UTM



 <https://pharmacy.uitm.edu.my/>



 +603-3258 4645

 korporatff@uitm.edu.my