Review Article

Analysis of prison health services in relation to strengthen the service delivery

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Abstract

Introduction Strengthening of health care provision to prisoners and detainees is a paramount need in the present context. Health status of detainees can affect the health states of the prisoners as well as the community. At present, Sri Lankan prisons are overcrowded. Therefore, the prisoners are vulnerable for various communicable diseases. This is an eye-opening approach to strengthen the prison health.

Objective To analyze the prison health services in relation to strengthen the prison health services.

Methods A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in both the Medical services division of Ministry of Health where the Director In charge of Prison Health is attached and the Prison Hospital, Welikada. Both qualitative and quantitative method were used for data collection

Results There are deficiencies in human resources including vacancy of Director In charge of Prison Health. The process Notification of Communicable diseases has been started recently in prison hospital Welikada.

Conclusion Ministry of Health should contribute to develop policies in prison department when it affects prisoner's health and should streamline the human resource management including filling the vacancies of "Director In Charge of Prison Health".

Introduction

Prisoners or the detainees are more vulnerable to ill health. Prison life is more stressful. Detainees are away from their day to day life, families and some are drug users[1]. Most of the Sri Lankan prisons are overcrowded. They are uncertain of their future. Therefore, higher prevalence of communicable diseases is common among people in prison compared with the general public. This is recognized as a public health issue as well as a major concern for people affected, and finally majority return to their respective communities[2]. Active case finding is a key prevention measure to promote early diagnosis, treatment and to prevent further disease transmission.Good prison health creates considerable benefits. It prevents the spread of diseases and promotes health through awareness of what everyone can do to help maintain their own health and well-being[3] and that of others. In addition, however, it can help to improve the health status of communities, thus contributing to health for all.

Objective

To Analysis of prison health services in relation to strengthen the service delivery

Methods

Descriptive cross sectional study was conducted in both Prison Hospital Wellikada and medical services unit, Ministry of Health. Senior officers in Ministry of Health and Medical Officer In-Charge (MOIC) of Prison Hospital, Wellikada was interviewed based on the prepared guide questions. Observations were documented during prison visits. In addition, national data related to prison health (i.e., selected ordinance, reports, government circulars on disease surveillance system and disease surveillance of prison hospital) were reviewed.

Results

Legal provision for prison administration in Sri Lanka is the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and 'Prison Ordinance and Rule' of Sri Lanka that was enacted in 1844 and revised in 1956., Provisions for organizing prison health services has been included in 'Prison Ordinance and Rule' [4].

In Prison Ordinance and Rule', it is clearly indicated that appointment and supervision of Medical officers and apothecaries (Registered Medical Practitioner) should be done by Director of Health Services (Director General of Health Services). Diagram 1 shows administrative hierarchy of Prison Hospital.

Prison Hospital Welikada is situated in Welikada prison premises. It is a 187 bedded hospital. Medical Officer In-charge (MOIC) is the administrative head of the hospital In prison hospital Medical Officers, Dental Surgeons, MLTs are trained from Health Ministry officers(Table 1). However Nursing officers are personals from the prison department and trained as nurses. Radiographer is from National Programme for Tuberculosis and Chest Diseases (NPTCCD). A Visiting Physician from National Hospital Sri Lanka conducts Medical clinic. There are several clinics including skin, STD, Surgery and Orthopedic clinic are conducting by Medical Officers. NPTCCD is also conducting clinic for Chest Diseases. There is no approved cadre for Wellikada Prison Hospital. However there is a approved cadre for whole prison health services.

Financial Management of Prison Hospital is done by Department of Prison While drug supply is by Medical Supply Division , Ministry of Health.

Notified diseases surveillance system

Process of notification is recently started in prison hospital Welikada(December 2019). However basic awareness among health staff was done before commencing the process.

Diseases like Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and leprosy are notified by relevant clinics. Laboratory is also notified certain diseases.

Hospital Morbidity and Mortality surveillance system

In prison Indoor Mortality and Morbidity Register is maintained by designated RMO. Quarterly Indoor Mortality and Morbidity Return (IMMMR) is filled from Indoor Mortality and Morbidity Register. Relevant officer is trained for the said task. However there is no space allocated for prison health in Annual Health Bulletin.

Discussion

Prison health is an important part of the public health. It is a paramount need in the present context for streamlining the prison health system. Many studies shows people in prison are more vulnerable for infectious diseases in comparison with the general public. The diseases like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and tuberculosis (TB) are more prevalent in the prison[5][6].

Most of detainees are from poor social groups. Some of them are drug addicts[7]. The increased prevalence of communicable diseases among people in prisons is recognized as a major risk for both prison and community.

It is important to invest and conduct disease surveillance because it serves as early warning system and identify public health emergencies. Further it guide for public health policy and strategies. As notifiable disease surveillance is started recently and it should be further developed. Sentinel sites surveillance system and Entomological surveillance are not operated in prison hospital.

Diagram 1 Administrative hierarchy of Prison Hospital

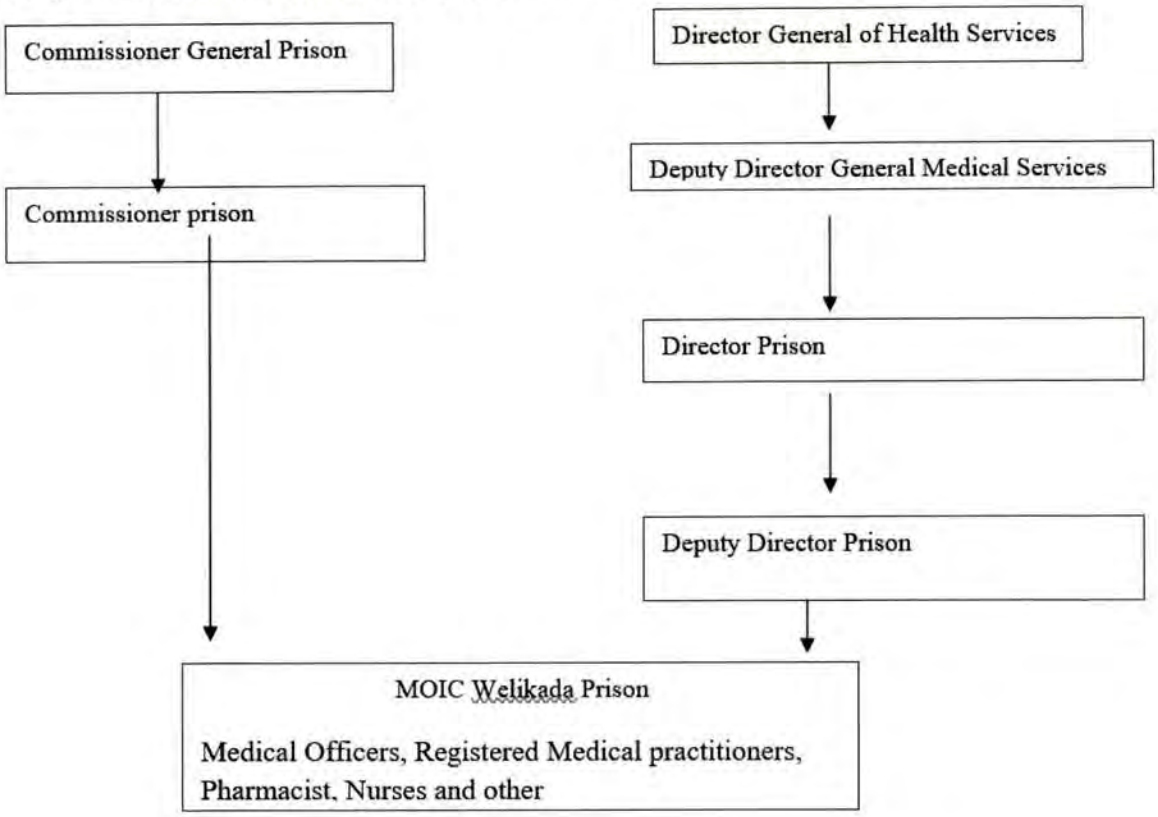

Table 1 Details of Human Resource in Prison Hospital Wellikada

Category	Number
Medical Officer In charge(MOIC)	1
Medical Officers	10
Registered Medical Officers	6
Dental Surgeons	2
Nurses	8
Medical Laboratory Technologists(MLT)	1
Pharmacist	-
ECG Technician	-
Radiographer	1
Public Health Inspector(PHI)	1
Driver	1

Conclusions

1 Health care provision to prison is a shared responsibility of both Department of Prison and Ministry of Health.

2. At present, there is no Director in charge of prison health services. Covering up arrangement was established. Deputy Director – Prison health services is also vacant. Deputy Director is also covering up for the post and frequently persons are changed.

3. Some technical post were vacant.

4. Notifiable disease surveillance is started recently and less follow up by Ministry of Health and Epidemiology unit

5. In Annual Health Bulletin, there is no chapter is allocated for prison health.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, following recommendations can be made.

- **Strengthening Leadership and Governance**
  Permanent Director in Charge of Prison and Deputy Director Prison should be appointed.
  Frequent and regular supervision by epidemiology unit and medical services unit is needed to streamline the system.
  As the process of notification of communicable diseases was recently started, more awareness programmes should be conducted.

- **Strengthening the human resource**
  Some posts seem vacant and some officers are over stay especially medical officers and registered medical officers (RMO). Therefore, it is mandatory to fill the vacancies and promote implementation of transfers.MOIC – prison hospital is doing both clinical and management duty. Therefore, MOIC–prison hospital should be equipped with both technical and management knowledge. Medical officers and other staff should be provided with necessary updates and training on disease surveillance specially notification of communicable diseases. The staff of the respective institutions should be motivated as they are working with vulnerable population.
- **Strengthening the information system[9][10]**
- **Inter-sectoral collaboration**
  Strengthening of disease surveillance in prisons is important. Ministry of Health should establish collaboration with other institutions such as Department of Prison, Dangerous drug Authority, etc.
- **Research and innovations**
  In Sri Lanka, studies on prison health are very few. Therefore, scholars and researchers should be encouraged to conduct studies on prison health

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