

Prevention is better than cure!

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Public health medicine is the branch of medicine that focuses on the prevention of ill health, the promotion of good health and mitigates against the consequences of ill health through the combined efforts of society and the relevant communities. South Africa faces a quadruple burden of disease (Years of Life Lost plus Years Lived with Disability as a measure of burden). These are HIV/AIDS; maternal and child health deaths (through HIV, PPH in mothers and ARI and diarrhoeal diseases in children); non-communicable diseases and trauma. All of these can be prevented using the correct public health preventative tools such as education (safe sex); early antenatal bookings and follow-ups for pregnant mothers; appropriate immunisation of children and limits on alcohol abuse especially when driving, as well as harsher penalties for speeding.

The NHI makes special mention of primary health re-engineering and a focus on preventative health but is short on detail. Nearly all infectious diseases in Africa can be washed away by the provision of access to clean potable water and good sanitation. Even the neglected tropical diseases can be averted by having access to clean safe water supplies. Our immunisation programme is one of the finest in the world and if we get high

enough herd immunity we can eliminate polio and measles too. Rabies can be averted in a cost-effective manner by having dogs vaccinated against rabies. All disciplines involved in infectious disease control should always bear in mind the importance of public health measures in the prevention of infectious diseases. A simple thing like handwashing can reduce nosocomial infections drastically.

A beautiful editorial in Public Health Today (December, 2016) asks the question "What has public health ever done for us?" It reflects on over 100 years of progress and the advances are quite substantial. As authors in the SAJID we should always reflect on the role of public health as a whole in our publications and there is not an article published in this journal that does not beg for a public health response in my opinion. Also, if one reflects on the many successes, it is quite clear that it is not only the domain of public health practitioners (the vast majority of whom are social scientists) but all of the health professionals as well as key stakeholders in society. However, without the involvement of all, we will continue to move down a slippery path of unaffordable costly curative care. Prevention is better than cure and far cheaper.