Snakebite is a neglected medical emergency in South Sudan

Due to increasing cases and requests from many developing countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated snakebite as a neglected tropical disease of high priority in 2017. According to WHO, "bites by venomous snakes can cause acute medical emergencies involving severe paralysis that may prevent breathing, cause bleeding disorders that can lead to fatal haemorrhage, cause irreversible kidney failure and severe local tissue destruction that can cause permanent disability and limb amputation."[1]

The data coming out of the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)snakebite programme in Agok are a cause for concern for this medical emergency (See article on page 146).[2] With no centralized data on snakebites from across the country, this bellwether programme should be celebrated and replicated.

Different states have varied rates and incidences of snakebites and one size fits interventions may not be relevant. However, a clear programme would put snakebite high on the agenda and help prevent needless deaths. When there are no specific integrated programmes, individuals resort to traditional and ineffective remedies for snakebites which could do more harm than good.

This issue is compounded by the lack of antivenoms, awareness by health workers, poor training and appropriate treatment guidelines and protocols.

The Ministry of Health and all relevant NGOs should ramp up efforts to expand the snakebite programmes by integrating them into the primary healthcare system, developing awareness and training materials, as well as ensuring the availability of antivenom as part of the essential drugs list. The MSF programme in Agok has shown that it can be done.

Let us do it.

Edward Eremugo Kenyi

Editor-in-Chief

South Sudan Medical Journal

opikiza@yahoo.com

Reference

1. World Health Organization Factsheets
2. Said et al. Perspectives from MSF Snakebite Programme Implementation in Agok, Abyei region, South Sudan. South Sudan Medical Journal 2020; 13(4):146-152