Acute respiratory infections (ARI) are a major public health problem and one of the commonest reasons for visiting primary health care centers (PHC). In developing countries, seventy-five percent of the cases are treated with antibiotics, although the majority are caused by viral infection. Our aim was to observe the pattern of physician practices with respect to ARI, in comparison to WHO protocols and to provide recommendations for health promotion enhancement. The study was conducted in Makkah PHC centers, for 2 months. A total 14 PHC centers were randomly selected. And 908 prescriptions were obtained randomly from general practitioners (GP) and analyzed. We found that males were 522 and females were and 386. Weights were not recorded in 224 (24.7%) cases. In 87 cases (9.6%) no diagnosis was recorded. In 515 (62.34%) of cases, antibiotics were prescribed; most of these cases were of simple common cold, with antibiotics not recommended. To conclude, many physicians in Makkah are not following the WHO guidelines for Acute Respiratory Infection. Educational health programs should be conducted to sensitize the physicians regarding the appropriate method of diagnosis and rational use of antibiotics.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).
E) Empiric cotrimoxazole treatment for suspected Pneumocystis jiroveci (previously Pneumocystiscarinii) pneumonia (PCP) is recommended as an additional treatment for HIV-infected and -exposed infants aged from 2 months up to 1 year with chest in drawing or severe pneumonia. F) Empirical cotrimoxazole treatment for Pneumocystis jiroveci pneumonia (PCP) is not recommended for HIV-infected and -exposed children over 1 year of age with chest in drawing or severe pneumonia. [33]. This study was conducted to observe the pattern of physicians’ prescriptions, to determine their practices related to ARI management and compliance with WHO protocols, and to provide recommendations to enhance their practices in primary health care centers.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Setting

The study was conducted in Primary Health Care Centres (PHC) of Makkah Al Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia.

2.2. Study Design

A cross-sectional study, conducted from 1/2/2016 to 31/3/2016.

2.3. Sample Size

The sample size was calculated using the online software of Epi Info, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), using a confidence level of 95%. As our technique was cluster sampling we chose a design effect of 2.0. The estimated sample size was 769. An additional 20% (154) was added to account for dropouts, because of possibility of refusal of any PHC physician to participate in the study with a final total of 923. (For details please, see Appendix A below).

2.4. Sampling Procedure

The sampling technique used was Multistage cluster sampling, to select PHC centers during the first phase of the study, then to select registered physicians in the second phase of the study and then later to select their prescriptions. After obtaining the list of all PHC centers of Makkah from the Ministry of Health, we randomly selected 20% of the PHC centers with the help of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) version 21. As there are 70 PHC centers in Makkah, a total 14 PHC centers were selected. From each selected PHC center we randomly selected general practitioners and from each physician we randomly selected their prescriptions for ARI. After obtaining their consent, a total of 908 prescriptions were collected by going to their clinics daily and collecting the prescriptions. We compared the prescriptions with WHO guidelines recommendations for acute respiratory infections [33]. The main variables assessed, beside basic demographic characteristics, included: chief complaints, temperature, pulse rate, respiratory rate, provisional diagnosis and the type of antibiotic prescribed. All variables were entered into the computer and analyzed by SPSS version 21.

The protocol was submitted to IRB of College of Medicine and ethical approval was obtained as HAPO-02-K-012-2016-02-142.

3. RESULTS

A total of 923 prescriptions were planned, whereas 908 prescriptions were collected, as one of the physician refused to participate in the study. The majority of children, 558/908 (61.5%), were in public PHC centers and 350/908 (38.5%) of them were in private PHC centers. By gender, more than half of the cases were males i.e. 522/908 (57.5%) and females accounted for 386/908 (42.5%). (Table 1).

The predominant categories of age were from 1 to 5 years (289/908, 31.8%) and 6–10 years (258/908, 28.4%) (Table 1).

Table 1 Profile of children presenting to PHCs with acute respiratory infection, Makkah, KSA, 2016

| Variables                        | Number of cases | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Age (Years)                      |                 |                |
| Less than 1                      | 69              | (7.6%)         |
| 1–5                              | 289             | (31.8%)        |
| 6–10                             | 258             | (28.4%)        |
| 11–15                            | 161             | (17.7%)        |
| 16–18                            | 131             | (14.4%)        |
| More than 18                     | 0               | (0%)           |
| Gender                           |                 |                |
| Male                             | 522             | (57.5%)        |
| Female                           | 386             | (42.5%)        |
| Type of center                   |                 |                |
| Public                           | 558             | (61.5%)        |
| Private                          | 350             | (38.5%)        |
| Chief complaint                  |                 |                |
| Fever                            | 120             | (13.2%)        |
| Cough                            | 75              | (8.3%)         |
| Runny nose                       | 24              | (2.6%)         |
| Sore throat                      | 13              | (1.4%)         |
| More than one respiratory symptom| 569             | (62.7%)        |
| Others                           | 68              | (7.5%)         |
| Not written                      | 39              | (4.3%)         |
| Physical examination             |                 |                |
| Congested throat                 | 121             | (13.3%)        |
| Ear problems                     | 51              | (5.6%)         |
| Pharyngeal tonsillar erythema    | 99              | (10.9%)        |
| Tonsillar exudate                | 35              | (3.9%)         |
| More than one respiratory finding| 188             | (20.7%)        |
| Others                           | 55              | (6.1%)         |
| Not written                      | 359             | (39.5%)        |
| Clinical diagnosis               |                 |                |
| Pneumonia with tachypnea, no costal retractions or general danger signs | 15 | (1.7%) |
| Pneumonia with costal retractions| 5               | (0.6%)         |
| Severe pneumonia                 | 1               | (0.1%)         |
| Common cold                      | 227             | (25.0%)        |
| Upper respiratory tract infection| 103             | (11.3%)        |
| Allergic asthma                  | 11              | (1.2%)         |
| Tonsillitis and pharyngitis       | 35              | (3.8%)         |
| Bronchial asthma                 | 11              | (1.2%)         |
| Pharyngitis                      | 123             | (13.5%)        |
| Lower respiratory tract infection| 9               | (1.0%)         |
| Tonsillitis                      | 104             | (11.5%)        |
| Otitis media                     | 56              | (6.2%)         |
| Otitis externa                   | 10              | (1.1%)         |
| Bronchitis                       | 51              | (5.6%)         |
| Bronchiolitis                    | 12              | (1.3%)         |
| Influenza                        | 17              | (1.9%)         |
| Others                           | 48              | (5.3%)         |
| Not written                      | 70              | (7.7%)         |
| Total                            | 908             | (100%)         |
Chief complaints were recorded in 869/908 (95.7%) cases. Most common single chief complaint was fever in 120/869 (13.8%), cough in 75/869 (8.6%), rhinorrhea in 24/869 (2.7%), and sore throat in 13/869 (1.4%) cases. More than one respiratory symptom was recorded in 569/869 (65.4%), and other complaints formed 68/869 (7.8%) of all cases. (Table 1) Unfortunately, only 550/908 (60.5%) of the paediatric patients were physically examined. Physical examination findings demonstrated: congested throat in 121/550 (22%), ear problems were found in 51/550 (9.3%), pharyngeal tonsillar erythema in 99/550 (18%) tonsillar exudate in 35/550 (6.4%), more than one respiratory finding in 188/550 (34.2%), other findings were found in 55/550 (10%) cases (Table 1).

Diagnosis was recorded in 838/908 (92.3%) of cases, with the most common diagnosis being common cold at 227/838 (27.6%), followed by 123/838 cases of pharyngitis (15%), 104/838 Tonsillitis (12.6%) and pneumonia in only 21/838 cases (2.4%). Other diagnoses were noted in 346/838 (42.1%) of cases (Table 1).

Pneumonia with tachypnea, without costal retractions or general danger signs, were noted in 15/21 cases (71.4%), pneumonia with costal retractions in 5/21 cases (23.8%) and only 1/21 child suffered from severe pneumonia (4%) (Table 1).

684/908 (75.3%) of patients had their weights recorded during their visit. Of the three main vital signs, heart rate was recorded in 602/908 (66.3%), temperature in 764/908 (84.1%) and respiratory rate in 582/908 (64.1%) (Table 2).

Overall, antibiotics were prescribed in 515/908 cases (56.7%), distributed as either a single therapy in 103/515 (20%), a combination of antibiotic and antipyretics in 164/515 (31.8%), or as antibiotics with other drugs in 248/515 (48.1%) (Fig. 1).

First choice of antibiotic prescribed was Amoxicillin in 275/515 (53.3%) of cases, second choice was Ceftriaxone in 81/515 (15.7%), followed by Augmentin in 45/515 (8.7%), various other antibiotics in 90/515 (17.5%), and lastly more than one antibiotic was prescribed in 14/515 cases (2.7%) (Fig. 2).

4. DISCUSSION

In the PHC of Makkah, the incidence of ARI in children under 5 years old was 358 (39.4%). Several studies had a similar incidence of approximately 30–40% in children below 5 years - Al-Khalidi, Ramani, and Peasah [8,34,35]. In contrast, Siddiqui found an ARI incidence of 83.2% [7].

In the majority of studies, including ours, ARI cases consisted of upper respiratory tract infections (URTI). Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTI), such as pneumonia, bronchitis and bronchiolitis, were 10% in our study as well as in Al-Khalidi, and Saeed [8,34]. Sarfraz [25] reported a higher respiratory tract infections rate of 68%.

This study, as well as most other studies, found patients, predominantly, of male gender: Siddiqui, Al-Khalidi, Krishnan, and Dharmage [7,8,34,36,37], in contrast to Acharya [4] where both genders were equivalent. Chandwani [38] reported a male-dominated society as a possible reason.

Table 2  Distribution of the recording of various variables required to support a diagnosis

| Features recorded     | Yes   | No    |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Weight                | 684 (75.3%) | 224 (24.7%) |
| Temperature           | 764 (84.1%) | 144 (15.9%) |
| Heart rate            | 602 (66.3%) | 306 (33.7%) |
| Respiratory rate      | 582 (64.1%) | 326 (35.9%) |
| Chief complaints      | 869 (95.7%) | 39 (4.3%) |
| Physical examination  | 550 (60.6%) | 358 (39.4%) |
| Provisional diagnosis | 838 (92.3%) | 70 (7.7%) |

In the PHC of Makkah, the incidence of ARI in children under 5 years old was 358 (39.4%). Several studies had a similar incidence of approximately 30–40% in children below 5 years - Al-Khalidi, Ramani, and Peasah [8,34,35]. In contrast, Siddiqui found an ARI incidence of 83.2% [7].

In the majority of studies, including ours, ARI cases consisted of upper respiratory tract infections (URTI). Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTI), such as pneumonia, bronchitis and bronchiolitis, were 10% in our study as well as in Al-Khalidi, and Saeed [8,34]. Sarfraz [25] reported a higher respiratory tract infections rate of 68%.

This study, as well as most other studies, found patients, predominantly, of male gender: Siddiqui, Al-Khalidi, Krishnan, and Dharmage [7,8,34,36,37], in contrast to Acharya [4] where both genders were equivalent. Chandwani [38] reported a male-dominated society as a possible reason.

Table 2  Distribution of the recording of various variables required to support a diagnosis

| Features recorded     | Yes   | No    |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Weight                | 684 (75.3%) | 224 (24.7%) |
| Temperature           | 764 (84.1%) | 144 (15.9%) |
| Heart rate            | 602 (66.3%) | 306 (33.7%) |
| Respiratory rate      | 582 (64.1%) | 326 (35.9%) |
| Chief complaints      | 869 (95.7%) | 39 (4.3%) |
| Physical examination  | 550 (60.6%) | 358 (39.4%) |
| Provisional diagnosis | 838 (92.3%) | 70 (7.7%) |
569 (65.4%) patients presented with more than one respiratory symptom. The single most common complaint was fever, seen in 120 cases (13.8%), with a similar rate reported by Siddiqui [7] and Chandwani [21]. A much higher rate of 98.8% was found in Ramani [34]. Al-Khalid [8] reported 70% of cases complained of cough.

Vital signs were recorded in this study and in Siddiqui [7] as follows: Temperature 144 (15.9%), 106 (52%); Heart rate 306 (33.7%), 177 (88%); Respiratory rate 326 (35.9%), 135 (67%); and Weight 224 (24.7%), 132 (65%), respectively. Al-Khalid [8] and Ramani [34] did not mention these variables.

Congested throat was the most frequent finding in this study and Al-Khalid [8]. Interestingly, the rank order of the most common diagnoses was similar between this study and that of Al-Khalid [8]: Common cold was first (27.6%, 42%), followed by pharyngitis (15%, 25%), and tonsillitis (12.6%, 17%), respectively. This may be due to physician habits within the same nation.

Diagnosis was written in the great majority of PHC cases, in 92.3%, similar to Al-Khalid [8] at 97.5%. In contrast, in Siddiqui [7] the diagnosis was written in less than half of the cases (44.6%).

The drug of choice was Amoxicillin in 275 (53.3%) of cases, followed by Ceftriaxone in 81 (15.7%), and Augmentin in 45 (8.7%) cases. One of the reason of prescribing, antibiotic other than amoxicillin, as observed by us, was non-availability of amoxicillin, in some of the centers. Siddiqui [7] reported the most common antibiotic prescribed as Amoxicillin in 21.4%, followed by a first generation cephalosporin (19.9%) and co-trimoxazole (14.3%). A recent study in Morocco by Jroundi [39] found the most commonly prescribed antibiotic was a cephalosporin (213/286; 74.5%), followed by macrolides (21%), then Gentamicin (13.6%). Al-Khalid [8] did not report antibiotic classes. According to revised WHO guidelines, Amoxicillin should be given as first line of treatment and Ceftriaxone as second line of treatment [33].

Our study limitation is the duration of sample collection; it was conducted at the end of the local winter season because of late approval from ethical committee.

5. CONCLUSION

Many physicians in Makkah Al Mukarramah are not following the WHO guidelines for Acute Respiratory Infection. Educational health programs should be conducted to sensitize the physicians as well as patients regarding the appropriate method of diagnosis and rational use of antibiotics [40].

ETHICAL CONSENT

The consent of practitioners were sought before obtaining the prescriptions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research, authorship and/or publication of this manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Bashar Omar Babkour, Haneen Salah Al-Masoudi, Noura Awad Almalki and Marya Abdurrahman Alqithami for their role in data collection.

APPENDIX A. SAMPLE SIZE FOR FREQUENCY IN A POPULATION

Population size (for finite population correction factor or fpc) (N): 1600000

Hypothesized % frequency of outcome factor in the population (p): 50% ± 5

Confidence limits as % of 100(absolute ±%) (d): 5%

Design Effect (for cluster surveys-DEFF): 2

Sample Size(n) for Various Confidence Levels.

| Confidence level (%) | Sample size |
|----------------------|-------------|
| 95%                  | 769         |
| 90%                  | 542         |
| 95%                  | 942         |
| 99%                  | 1327        |
| 99.9%                | 2165        |
| 99.99%               | 3026        |

Sample size n = [DEFF * Np(1−p)] / (d² / Z1−α/2 * (N − 1) + p * (1−p))

Results from OpenEpi, Version 3, open source calculator—SSPropor

Print from the browser with ctrl-P

or select text to copy and paste to other programs.

REFERENCES

[1] Francis NA, Butler CC, Hood K, Simpson S, Wood F, Nuttall J. Effect of using an interactive booklet about childhood respiratory tract infections in primary care consultations on reconsulting and antibiotic prescribing: a cluster randomised controlled trial. BMJ 2009;339:b2885.

[2] UNICEF | The State of World Children 2013 [http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/].

[3] Reddiah V, Kapoor SK. Acute respiratory infections in rural underfives. Indian J Pediatr 1988;55:424–6.

[4] Acharya D, Prasanna K, Nair S, Rao R. Acute respiratory infections in children: a community based longitudinal study in South India. Indian J Public Health 2002;47:7–13.

[5] Mitra NK. A longitudinal study on ARI among rural underfives. Indian J Community Med 2001;26:8–11.

[6] Wang H, Zheng Y, Deng J, Wang W, Liu P, Yang F, et al. Prevalence of respiratory viruses among children hospitalized from respiratory infections in Shenzhen, China. Virol J 2016;13:1.

[7] Siddiqui MI, Baloch AA, Ahmed SI, Ijafri SIA. Audit of prescribing patterns of doctors for the management of acute respiratory infections in children. Elective Med J 2014;2:6–9.

[8] Al-Khalid YM, Diab MM, Al-Gelban KS, Al-Asmari AS, Al-Amin S, Al-Shahrani MS. Prescribing patterns for acute respiratory
infections in primary health care, ascertainment in Saudi Arabia. J Family Community Med 2005;12:121−6.

[9] Saeed AA, Bani IA. Prevalence and correlates of acute respiratory infections in children less than two years of age. Saudi Med J 2000;21:1152−6.

[10] van Gageldonk-Laferbe AH, Heijnen M-IA, Bartelds AI, Peters MF, van der Plas SM, Wilbrink B. A case-control study of acute respiratory tract infection in general practice patients in The Netherlands. Clin Inf Dis 2005;41:490−7.

[11] Dyar OJ, Beović B, Vlahović-Palčevski V, Verheij T, Pulcini C. How can we improve antibiotic prescribing in primary care? Expert Rev Anti-infective Therapy 2016;14:403−13.

[12] Urrusuno RF, Dorado MF, Arenas AV, Martino CS, Baena SC, Balosa MCM. Improving the appropriateness of antimicrobial use in primary care after implementation of a local antimicrobial guide in both levels of care. Eur J Clin Pharmacol 2014;70:1011−20.

[13] Nash DR, Harman J, Wald ER, Kelleher KJ. Antibiotic prescribing by primary care physicians for children with upper respiratory tract infections. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 2002;156:1114−9.

[14] Goossens H, Ferech M, Vander Stichele R, Elseviers M, Group EP. Outpatient antibiotic use in Europe and association with resistance: a cross-national database study. The Lancet 2005;365:579−87.

[15] Petersen I, Hayward AC. Antibacterial prescribing in primary care. J Antimicrob Chemotherapy 2007;60:43−17.

[16] Serna M, Ribes E, Real J, Galván L, Gascó E, Godoy P. High exposure to antibiotics in the population and differences by sex and age. Aten Primaria 2011;43:236−44.

[17] Lallana-Alvarez MJ, Feja-Solana C, Armesto-Gómez J, Bjerrum L, Rabanaque-Hernandez MJ. Outpatient antibiotic prescription in Aragón and the differences by gender and age. Enferm Infecc Microbiol Clin 2012;30:591−6.

[18] Holloway KA, Ivanovska V, Wagner AK, Viale-Valentin C, Ross-Degnan D. Prescribing for acute childhood infections in developing and transitional countries, 1990−2009. Paediatr Int Child Health 2015;35:5−13.

[19] Arroll B. Antibiotics for upper respiratory tract infections: an overview of Cochrane reviews. Respir Med 2005;99:255−61.

[20] Smith SM, Fahey T, Smucny J, Becker LA. Antibiotics for acute bronchitis. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2004;4.

[21] Puhan MA, Vollenweider D, Latshang T, Steurer J, Steurer-Stey C. Exacerbations of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: when are antibiotics indicated? A systematic review. Respir Res 2007;8:30.

[22] Ong DS, Kuyvenhoven MM, Van Dijk L, Verheij TJ. Antibiotics for respiratory, ear and urinary tract disorders and consistency among GPs. J Antimicrob Chemother 2008;62:587−92.

[23] Llor C, Cots J, Gaspar M, Alay M, Rams N. Antibiotic prescribing over the last 16 years: fewer antibiotics but the spectrum is broadening. Eur J Clin Microbiol Infect Dis 2009;28:893−7.

[24] Adriaenssens N, Coenen S, Versporten A, Muller A, Minalu G, Faes C, et al. European Surveillance of Antimicrobial Consumption (ESAC): outpatient antibiotic use in Europe (1997−2009). J Antimicrob Chemother 2011;66 Suppl 6:v13−v12.

[25] Sarfraz T. Acute respiratory infections in children. Pak Armed Forces Med J 1996;46:28−32.

[26] Ojeniran M, Shouval R, Miskin IN, Moses AE, Shmueli A. Costs of appropriate and inappropriate use of antibiotics in the emergency department. IMAJ-Israel Med Assoc J 2010;12:742.

[27] Murphy M, Bradley CP, Byrne S. Antibiotic prescribing in primary care, adherence to guidelines and unnecessary prescribing—an Irish perspective. BMC Family Pract 2012;13:43.

[28] Martínez MA, Ingład L, Ochoa C, Villagrasa JR. Treatments of antibiotics in primary care for adults presenting with acute exacerbations of chronic bronchitis. Clin Ther 2007;5:235−44.

[29] Tobi A, Aspinall SL, Good CB, Fine MJ, Hanlon JT. Appropriateness of antibiotic prescribing in veterinarians with community-acquired pneumonia, sinusitis, or acute exacerbations of chronic bronchitis: a cross-sectional study. Clin Ther 2008;30:1135−44.

[30] Lee C-C, Lee C-H, Chuang M-C, Hong M-Y, Hsu H-C, Ko W-C. Impact of inappropriate empirical antibiotic therapy on outcome of bacteremic adults visiting the ED. Am J Emerg Med 2012;30:1447−56.

[31] Costelloe C, Metcalfe C, Lovering A, Mant D, Hay AD. Effect of antibiotic prescribing in primary care on antimicrobial resistance in individual patients: systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ 2010;340:c2996.

[32] Butler CC, Hillier S, Roberts Z, Dunstan F, Howard A, Palmer S. Antibiotic-resistant infections in primary care are symptomatic for longer and increase workload: outcomes for patients with E. coli UTIs. Br J Gen Pract 2006;56:686−92.

[33] Revised WHO classification and treatment of pneumonia in children at health facilities: evidence summaries, 2014.

[34] Ramani VK, Pattankar JK, Puthawonnappa SK. Acute Respiratory Infections among Under-Five Age Group Children at Urban Slums of Gulbarga City: A Longitudinal Study. J Clin Diagn Res 2016;10:LC08.

[35] Peasah SK, Purakayastha DR, Koul PA, Dawood FS, Saha S, Amarchand R, et al. The cost of acute respiratory infections in Northern India: a multi-site study. BMC Public Health 2015;15:1.

[36] Krishnan A, Amarchand R, Gupta V, Lafond KE, Suliankatchi RA, Saha S, et al. Epidemiology of acute respiratory infections in children-preliminary results of a cohort in a rural north Indian community. BMC Infect Dis 2015;15:15.

[37] Dharmage SC, Rajapaksara LC, Fernando DN. Risk factors of acute lower respiratory tract infections in children under five years of age. Southeast Asian J Trop Med Public Health 1996;27:107−10.

[38] Chandwani H, Pandor J. Healthcare-Seeking Behaviors of Mothers regarding their Children in a Tribal Community of Gujarat, India. Electron Physician 2015;7:990.

[39] Jroundi I, Benmessaud R, Mharaoui C, Moreda C, Tiggui H, Seffar M, et al. Antibiotic usage prior and during hospitalization for clinical severe pneumonia in children under five years of age in Rabat. Morocco Antibiotics 2013;2:450−64.

[40] Md Rezal RS, Hassali MA, Alrasheedy AA, Saleem F, Md Yusof FA, Godman B. Physicians' knowledge, perceptions and behaviour towards antibiotic prescribing: a systematic review of the literature. Exp Rev Anti-infective Ther 2015;13:665−80.