

SAFE DRINKING WATER: A DESPARATE NEED

Habibullah Khan

Department of Medicine, Gomal Medical College, D.I.Khan, Pakistan

Water is essential for life. Clean and safe drinking water is a basic human right. Unfortunately, more than one in six people still lack reliable access to this precious resource. The problem is particularly acute in the developing countries.¹

In Pakistan, safe drinking water is a dream. Drinking water supply lines and open sewage drains are laid side by side which can be seen in the heavily populated communities resulting in frequent contamination of water and spread of water-borne infectious diseases.²

Unsafe drinking water is the usual source of epidemics of various infectious diseases like gastroenteritis, cholera, enteric fever, hepatitis A & E, etc.³

Water and sanitation related diseases are responsible for 60% of the total number of child mortality cases in Pakistan.⁴

A study published in this issue of the journal concludes that drinking water in Hyderabad, the sixth populated city of Pakistan, is heavily contaminated with potentially pathogenic multi drug resistant strains of *E. coli*. The source could possibly be the mixing of sewage lines with drinking water supply.⁵ Multi-drug resistant *E. coli* strains in the drinking water have been reported by other researchers as well.⁶

Contamination of drinking water by *E. coli* indicates its pollution by sewerage system, an alarming situation to take immediate action. It means diseases spread by faecal-oral route will flourish in the community and there is a need to educate the people.

The United Nation's Millenium Development Goals were created to dramatically improve the lives of the world's poorest. Many of these eight goals are water related.⁷ Pakistan is committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, specific to the current context; it is committed to reducing by half the population without access to safe and sustainable water supply by 2015.⁸

How this goal will be achieved, can government alone take the whole burden? No, not at all!

The community representatives and leaders have to come forwards, the doctors and paramedical staff has to offer their technical assistance in disseminating the lesson of safe water practice, the media has to educate the people as well. Our religion Islam has taught us to use safe drinking water. This goal can only be achieved by combined and committed efforts, otherwise 2015 is not far and the diseases spread by un-safe drinking water will keep knocking at our doors.

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