Chapter 8

Teachers’ Knowledge about Asthma and Asthma Management in Inclusive Classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago

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ABSTRACT

Although most students who suffer from asthma and asthmatic conditions are enrolled in the regular education setting at all levels of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago; there is no formal training at any level of the teacher education/training system which addresses the need for teachers to acquire knowledge about asthma and asthma management. Both international prevalence figures and informal local estimates suggest the presence of students with asthma in every single classroom. This study investigated the knowledge about asthma and asthma management of primary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. The main question was – What do primary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago know about asthma and asthma management? A random selection of 96 teachers from varied backgrounds participated in a two-part survey about their asthma knowledge and asthma management knowledge. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential

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INTRODUCTION

Asthma is one of the major problems in the Caribbean, and there are increasing concerns in the medical fraternity about the prevalence of asthma among persons in Trinidad and Tobago. Children are the most vulnerable group (Monteil, Changit, Wheeler, & Antoine, 2005). Regional research on asthma has indicated that the “incidence in Trinidad has increased 17 fold since 1973” (Caribbean Allergy & Respiration Association (CARA, 2010, p.1). The Ministry of Health along with the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) conduct annual free workshops and supply asthma medications to provide assistance to persons with asthma so that they can “take control of their asthma” (Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Health, 2010). Local and international studies such as (Al-Motlaq & Sellick, 2013; CARA, 2010; The Caribbean Research Council (CHRC), 2009; Jaramillo & Reznik, 2015) indicate that many primary school teachers are dissatisfied with their competence to deal with students with asthmatic problems at school. Such students are therefore educationally “at-risk”.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) listed Other Health Impairments as one of the categories included for students with disabilities. Included in the Other Health Impairments category are diabetes, epilepsy, haemophilia, and asthma; with the World Health Organization (WHO) identifying asthma as the most common noncommunicable disease among children.

Asthma Defined

Asthma is “a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways” (WHO, 2013, p.1). It is characterized by breathing difficulty, shortness of breath, coughing, tightness of chest and wheezing. Asthma can’t be cured but can be controlled (The International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood - ISAAC, 2011). The causes of asthma are not certain, but the major triggers that have been identified in the health fraternity are:
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