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Comparing diagnostic microbiology in two worlds

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Aim: Microbiology is the pillar of infectious disease diagnosis and treatment. Strengthening of services globally is mandatory to achieve health goals laid out by many organizations. However, diagnostic microbiology services offered even for diseases like Malaria, HIV, TB or diarrhoeal diseases that are prevalent in poor countries, differ remarkably between various labs. The presentation attempts to compare an advanced microbiology lab in California, with labs Cambodia, Africa and rural India.

Methodology & Observations: The observations are based on personal experiences of working in or visiting labs in different countries and settings. For any lab, compared to routine tests offered in haematology, biochemistry, serology, and urinalysis, providing reliable basic microbiology services is challenging. In less developed regions, it is a herculean task. Some of the many challenges faced are, lack of awareness among physicians and common folk about the contribution of clinical microbiology towards patient care, absence of or little regulation on QA/QC systems, formidable costs of infrastructure and unreliable supply of water or electricity. One is confronted with many burning questions. Is the disparity in different settings fair? Are the goals same? Whose responsibility is it to step up lab capacity building? Despite these obstacles, significant changes are taking place in some health care centers due to the efforts of one odd passionate microbiologist, pursuance by astute physicians, remarkable work of organizations like LabCAP, DMDP, CDC, etc., by inventors who have simplified diagnostic tools and made them affordable yet reliable and by global pressure to step up containment of diseases.

Conclusion: More of us need to get involved; efforts need to be constant and probably faster to keep pace with the growing population and spread of diseases.

Biography

Vasundhara Rangaswamy completed her MD from India and MS Clinical and Molecular Biology from California. She currently works in the clinical microbiology lab of Stanford Hospital and Clinics, California. She has been involved in lab capacity building in India, Cambodia and Ethiopia and also in public health initiatives in rural India for last 20 years. She has also been involved in teaching clinical microbiology and rural health issues to all levels of health care professionals.

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