

Mobilize Against Malaria

FIELD DIARY

Part 2: On the Road – Visiting the Licensed Chemical Sellers of Ashanti Region

Gudrun Hubinger is a Pfizer Global Health Fellow on assignment with the Mobilize Against Malaria Program in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. Her field diary attests to some of the great achievements (and everyday challenges!) of working to combat malaria on the ground.

From Businesses to Health Care Providers – LCSs at work

Over the last several weeks my FHI colleagues Yussif, Stephen, Oko and I have been traveling over 2000 kilometers throughout the entire Ashanti Region. In all 27 districts we visited over 160 Licensed Chemical Seller shops, completing mystery client interviews as well as monitoring and evaluating visits so that we can see how the LCSs are applying what they learnt in their MAM training, and what kind of effect this is having. We're gathering lots of anecdotal evidence of the ways in which LCSs are shifting from businesses to a healthcare providers, evidence that is backed up by a significantly higher dispense rate of WHO recommended Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT). So far the data analysis looks promising and will further contribute to the positive results of the Mobilize Against Malaria initiative.



An LCS outside his shop in Akronwi, Ashanti Region



Working with LCSs to train them in the process of record-keeping and referrals

The local Licensed Chemical Seller is often the first point of contact for patients or relatives, especially in rural regions, who are seeking advice or treatment for malaria. LCSs are private drug sellers who are licensed by the National Pharmacy Council of Ghana. Given their limited knowledge of medicine, these shop-owners are not always able to recognize signs of malaria, let alone identify a severe case that would warrant a referral to a health facility. It was clear to MAM partners Family Health International (FHI) and Ghana Social Marketing Foundation (GSMF) – who have been advocating for the work of LCSs for years – that Licensed Chemical Sellers were an untapped source of potential within the private health sector. The MAM program was developed with the intent to fill that knowledge gap and pilot the concept of using LCSs as an extension to healthcare system in rural communities.

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“LCSs under the MAM project are not just business people dishing out drugs for cash. They are educating patients and conducting referrals. They take pride in being part of the nucleus of health providers responding to malaria at the community level.”

—Henry Narh Nagai, Acting FHI/Ghana Country Director

Malaria and Everyday Life in Ashanti Region

Traveling round the Ashanti Region, I was also able to see the other side of the MAM initiative, which works to remind communities of the risks of malaria if it is not treated promptly and effectively. MAM Partners are working to educate communities about the symptoms and causes of malaria, around which there are still many myths and misconceptions. We use the slogan, “Malaria Kills – don’t take it for granted”.



Posters carrying the MAM message

Along the way, I was also able to get some insight into Ghanaian life beyond large cities such as Kumasi. Many remote villages lack power, running water and access to medical facilities. The signs of poverty are not really hard to miss. Recently, on the way from a village to the main road, we gave a lift to a woman who was about 60 years of age, carrying about 20 kilograms of produce from her farm where she grows plantains, bananas, coconuts and some vegetables. Twice a week she walks 10 to 15 km to the main road to sell her fruit and vegetables. The village where she lives has no power, no clinic, and no immediate access to medicine; if in need of medication, the residents of these villages have to walk many kilometers until the next LCS shop.



A billboard message alerting communities to the persistent risk of malaria from mosquitoes.

Pfizer Global Health Fellows

The Global Health Fellows Program utilizes the professional expertise of Pfizer colleagues through specialized volunteer assignments with international development organizations designed to address global health issues and improve care for underserved populations. Assignments are focused on strengthening health systems around the world to promote access, quality and efficiency of health services.

Mobilize Against Malaria (MAM)

Pfizer’s MAM Program is a five-year, three-country initiative that aims to increase prompt and effective treatment with Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) by educating communities and building the capacity of public, private and community sector treatment providers.