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The access to essential medicines for selected non communicable diseases in Sri Lanka.

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Objectives: To investigate the availability and affordability of essential medicines (EM) prescribed to treat hypertension, acute coronary syndrome (ACS), asthma and diabetes in public and private sectors of Sri Lanka.

Methods: Methodology was based on WHO/HAI manual. Data were collected from a representative sample of public hospital's (PH) OPD pharmacies, Raajya Osusalas (RO) and private pharmacies (PP). Availability and prices of EMs in lowest priced generic (LPG) and originator brand (OB) for above diseases were collected. Percentage availability, median prices, median price ratio (MPR) to the international reference price (IRP) and MPR of OB to government workers LPG were calculated. Affordability was determined using the daily incomes of the lowest paid unskilled

Results: RO had the highest (>80%) availability of LPG. Price of 62%(n=21) of selected medicines was less than 10 Sri Lankan Rupees (SLR). There is no significant difference in prices between RO and PP. The price of OB less than 10 SLR was 81%. There is a significant difference of prices among LPG and OB. The MPR to IRP was less than one for 7 LPG. The OB price for 7 medicines was more than five times of price of LPG. For most of the population, generic medicine prices are affordable. 48% of drugs required less than the daily wage to purchase one LPG for a month.

Conclusions: The EMs for above diseases are readily available in both public and private sectors. Such medicines are affordable to the lowest income earners in the community.