



Global Pharmacies: A Look into Drug Delivery at the Local and Global Levels



Maggie Fung
magfung@umd.edu
Global Public Health
General Biology

University Health Center

For my practicum, I volunteered at the University of Maryland Health Center's Pharmacy. Located at the heart of campus, the Health Center serves all students, faculty, and guests alike. It provides comprehensive clinical services such as primary/urgent care, mental health care, dental health, radiology, immunizations, physical therapy, and many more.



Service-Learning Experience

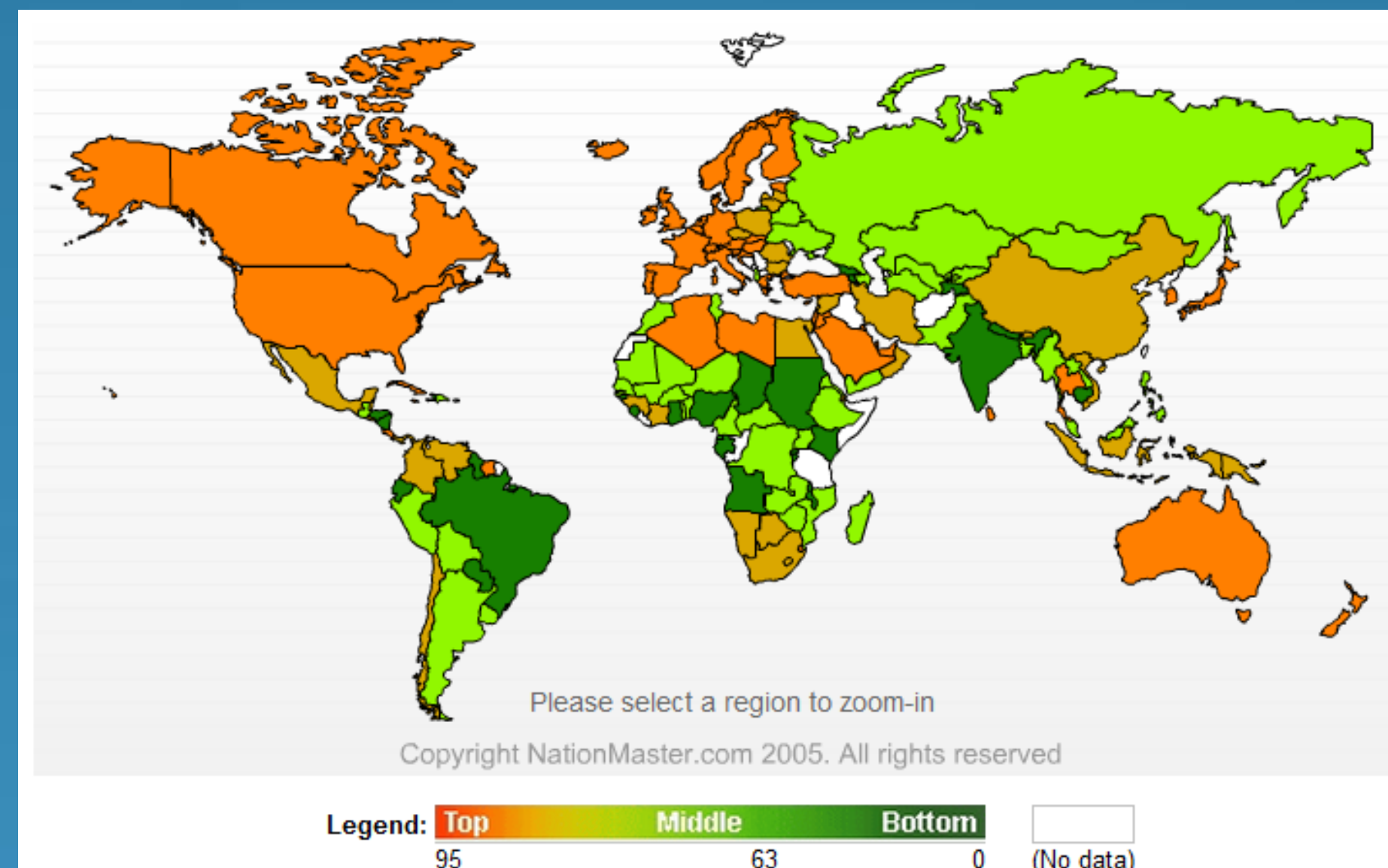
Working in the University pharmacy helped me gain a greater appreciation of the level of service delivery we have. Addressing the process of drug delivery has also helped me understand and apply many public health practices as well, such as patient confidentiality and direct patient service. This rewarding experience has taught me the importance of having an efficient system especially when dealing with patients.

At the pharmacy, I was responsible for greeting customers and processing their prescriptions. I also dispensed the prescriptions that the pharmacists prepare as well as resolve any questions that the customers may have. Some of the challenges I faced include inefficiency and lack of intermediary communication. Often times, the projected wait time I relay to a customer is longer than expected because of a delay in worker pace. Processing a prescription requires many intermediate steps from different people responsible for different tasks, so a delay in one step causes a cascading delay in subsequent steps. This experience highlights a common problem in service delivery. The second most prevalent challenge is the miscommunication between customers and their insurance companies. Many times I am unable to explain to customers why their insurance policies are set a certain way because they are not aware of them.

The Importance of Service Delivery

Service delivery is one of the most important areas to address in the subject of global public health. In countless developing countries around the world, vast numbers of people are unable to receive adequate health care because of the lack of service delivery mechanisms and affordability of the service. In the case of drug delivery, pharmacies are crucial facilities to have in all countries because they provide the medication directly to patients. However, because developing countries lack the availability and affordability of medication, more attention to health service delivery is essential.

Availability of Drugs Around the World



- In South Africa, for more than 4 million HIV infected individuals only 10,000 are able to afford access to AIDS medication
- In Malawi the reported figure is 30 out of 1 million infected Malawians and in Uganda about 1.2% of the estimated 820, 000 people living with AIDS can afford any of the drugs (Source: Journal of Medicine and Philosophy)
- In a study done by WHO, less than 7.5% of 32 chronic disease medicines were available in Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, and Pakistan (Source: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/85/4/0-033647.pdf>)

Findings

At the pharmacy, one of the main issues that I encountered was students who were unable to afford their medication. There have also been numerous instances where our pharmacy did not stock the medication that the students needed and I had to redirect them to another pharmacy. I have learned that these issues are even prevalent in developed countries like the United States, but the degree is not as drastic as that in developing countries. I was surprised to find that many insurance companies did not cover a majority of the cost of some common medications.



Conclusions

Service delivery is made possible by appropriate facilities. Pharmacies are the window to drug delivery. They are essential for providing medications to patients especially in places where access is limited. However, there are many other factors that affect drug delivery such as the cost of the drugs and availability of the drugs despite the presence of a pharmacy. Working at the pharmacy has given me an opportunity to contribute to the public health of the University through drug delivery. It has taught me that many countries, developed and developing, experience similar types of difficulties but on difference levels.

