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## Care-seeking in the development of severe community acquired pneumonia in Ugandan children.

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### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Improved case management of paediatric pneumonia is recognised as a key strategy for pneumonia control. Since symptoms of pneumonia and malaria often overlap, there are concerns that children with pneumonia are treated with antimalarial drugs. There is a need to describe how children with severe pneumonia have been managed prior to their arrival at hospital, including possible risks of developing more severe disease.

**METHODS:** A case-series study of 140 children, aged 2-59 months, with severe radiologically verified pneumonia at Mulago Hospital, Kampala was undertaken. Caretakers were interviewed about initial symptoms, treatment given and care sought. Using WHO definitions, children were clinically classified as having severe or very severe pneumonia.

**RESULTS:** The children had been ill for a median of 7 days before arrival at hospital, 90/140 (64%) had received treatment at home, and 72/140 (51%) had seen another health-care provider prior to presentation at hospital. Altogether, 32/140 (23%) children had reportedly received antibiotics only prior to admission, 18/140 (13%) had received anti-malarials only and 35/140 (25%) had received both. Being classified as very severe pneumonia was more common among children who had received anti-malarials only (OR 5.5, 1.8-16.4).

**CONCLUSIONS:** Although the majority of caretakers were able to recognise the key symptoms of pneumonia, they did not respond with any immediate care-giving action. Since progression from first recognition of pneumonia symptoms to severe disease is rapid, management guidelines regarding timing of care-seeking need to be clearly defined. The reason why children who sought health facility care failed to improve should be investigated. Meanwhile, there is a need to increase caretakers' and health workers' awareness of the urgency to act promptly when key pneumonia symptoms are observed.

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**MeSH Terms, Substances**

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