Health, Economics and Policy Unit (HEPU) Think Tank Meeting

On the 10th of December 2019, the Health, Economics and Policy Unit (HEPU) held its fourth Think Tank meeting at the College of Medicine, Lilongwe Campus. The Think Tank provides HEPU guidance in terms of identifying prominent challenges faced by government and the evidence needed to develop and support robust health policies.

Since its introduction, the Think Tank meetings have identified several issues and ignited interesting discussions on the health economics challenges that Malawi faces. One of the most emphasised challenges discussed was that of resource allocation. The scarcity resources have caused health care decision making a challenge across the world. Like many other low-income countries (LIC), Malawi is faced with challenges with regards to financing its healthcare system and with a growing demand for healthcare there is an imperative need to identify efficient ways to manage the resources available. During the meetings it was discovered decisions were being made based on political interventions, lobbyism, corruption and external values instead of optimal values. This proved to be expensive and led to the misallocation and procurement of low quality but high-cost equipment that is not user-friendly or appropriate for its context setting. This, consequently, has led to the inflation of costs.

Health technology assessment (HTA) can be defined as the systematic evaluation and impacts of health technologies. HTA is an interdisciplinary tool that can he used to address array of challenges. The tool can be used to assist law and policy makers in decision making regarding technologies and research to identifying research gaps and regulations drugs, devices and technologies. In high income countries, such as the UK, HTA is well established. While there have been attempts to develop HTA systems in middle income countries, such as Thailand and Ghana, HTA has not been widely used and has not been applied in low income countries like Malawi.

TLO is beginning a project to determine how HTA could be appropriately used within the context of Malawi’s health system. This will review processes applied in other settings, recognize their strengths and limitations and determine how
HTA could be best applied with potential for population health benefit in Malawi's health system. One tool that has been proposed and is rooted in the concepts of value of evidence and evidence of value, is the Value and Evidence-Based Decision Making and Policy (VED-MAP) tool. The VEDMAP tool aims to facilitate evidence-based decision making, taking into account societal and empirical values used to make decisions. Decisions on how best to utilise resources will be made after consideration of all available economic and ethical evidence. The proposed tool, VEDMAP, is designed to strengthen the HTA framework in meeting the needs of the Malawian setting.

The successful introduction of HTA and VEDMAP would ensure the efficient and equitable allocation of resources in Malawi, potentially serving as a model for other LICs.