

Editorial

Building civilization starts from childhood

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In his introductory presentation to the Forth Conference of the Sudan Association of Paediatricians (SAP) [1], which was held in Port Sudan (15th-16th February 1975), and in the President Speech (in Arabic) [2], the late Professor Mahmoud Mohamed Hassan [3] emphasized that investment on child welfare is rewarded by prosperity of a nation, as has been acknowledged and implemented by Developed Countries who achieved on the ladder of civilization, with high economic growth and national incomes. The Conference was attended by the Sudan Minister of Health and pediatricians from Egypt and the United Kingdom including Professor John Forfar [4] and Professor David Morley [5], both inspired generations of pediatricians worldwide. Attending also was Dr E. A. Shinebourne [6,7], the renown pediatric cardiologist and mentor of Professor Abdelmoneim Elseed, who pioneered pediatric cardiology in Sudan and Saudi Arabia [8]. Professor Elseed became the President of SAP and Editor-in-Chief of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SJP). The Review Article of this issue follows the main theme that building civilization starts from childhood. It highlights one of the greatest human triumphs against diseases, namely surfactant therapy used in the prevention and treatment of respiratory

distress syndrome (RDS), a major cause of mortality and morbidity in newborns. It also reflects the milestones of its development. In a historic study by Professor Mohamed Ibrahim A. Omer [9,10], who pioneered Neonatology in Sudan and established the first neonatal unit at Khartoum Teaching Hospital, RDS accounted for 40.3% of the deaths during the year 1972 and the mortality in babies weighing less than 908 gm approached 100%.

The first Original Article deals with perinatal mortality rate which is an important indicator of the level of health-care provided to the mother and her fetus, as well as the socio-economic status of the population. The article testified to the remarkable leap in health care witnessed by Saudi Arabia; evidenced by a corrected perinatal mortality rate over 15-year-period (1994-2008) of 11.9/1000, comparable to the North American and European rates.

The Review Article and the first Original Article are linked to an article on Historic Perspective highlighting the contribution of the late Professor Salah Abdelrahman Ali Taha (1927-1988) who is one of the pioneers of paediatrics in Sudan and Saudi Arabia. His impact was remarkable both in Sudan, establishing child health services, and in Saudi Arabia in heading and laying the foundation for the

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The second Original Article deals with traditional and spiritual medicine among Sudanese children with epilepsy. This cross sectional hospital based study dissects the impact of spiritual and traditional medicine in the management of childhood epilepsy in Sudan. Throughout history, epilepsy has been associated with a wide range of misconceptions and perceived as a supernatural disorder. In a study from Saudi Arabia, 55 of 141 (39%) parents thought that epilepsy is caused by Jinni (supernatural spirit) or evil eye [11]. The Article suggests positive involvement of traditional and spiritual healers in the management of epilepsy, similar to what has been pioneered worldwide by the late Professor Tigani El Mahi (1911-1970) in the management of psychiatric diseases in Sudan with fruitful outcome [12-15]. His suggestions back in the 1950's to integrate mental health into general health services, and that traditional healers should be involved in mental health programmes, were widely acknowledged and later adopted by the WHO [16,17].

This Original Article prompted the SJP to start a new section on Republished Articles and highlight the contributions of the late Professor Tigani El Mahi and his publications relative to child health which he wrote during his service as the Regional Mental Health Advisor in the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) of the WHO. These articles, which have mainly been published in local medical periodical, were later compiled in a book [18]. We would like here to acknowledge with thanks the permission for republishing this material graciously granted by Professor Ahmed El Safi [18] and Dr. Soad Tigani El Mahi, Head of Protocols Committee, SAP [19].

The third Original Article gives an account on the state of personal hygiene among primary school children in Banki, Nigeria and discusses the role of good personal hygiene as part of primary

health prevention strategy. Hygienic practices are not only a way for people to protect their health but also a way to improve the quality of their life. The earliest artifacts of human civilization include grooming implements and excavations in the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) depicted evidence of latrine and water supplies [20]. One of the world's earliest urban civilizations (3300-1300 BC) the IVC was contemporary to Mesopotamia Ancient Egypt and Kerma civilization in North Sudan [21]. Also the connection between cleanliness and godliness was clearly reflected in the teaching of religions [20].

The Case Report Section consists of three articles. The first reports on two cases of congenital chylothorax who were treated with octreotide. One of the cases responded to therapy, and the Authors concluded that octreotide should be considered in the management of chylothorax. The second article highlights a case of Kasabach-Merritt syndrome in a young baby who was saved by tracheostomy following the discovery, by dissect laryngoscopy, of large sized hemangioma at the larynx. The third article describes a Sudanese family with the father and all his four children manifesting Marfan syndrome. The father died at the age of 42 years from presumed ruptured aortic aneurysm; whereas his children received prophylactic treatment following detection by echocardiography of dilated aortic root in all patients, with stability of root measurements thereafter. One patient had, as well, patent ductus arteriosus managed successfully by transcatheter occluding device. This article which originated from the Department of Pediatric Cardiology, Sudan Heart Centre, Khartoum, Sudan testifies to the visionary thinking, about four decades ago, of Dr. E. A. Shinebourne, the mentor, and his student Prof. Abdelmoneim El Seed, the first Sudanese to specialize in pediatric cardiology [7]. It's also a reminder about the evolving higher contribution of genetic diseases in the underlying causes of morbidity and mortality in Sudan and the Region [22].

The second article in Historic Perspective reflects on the career of Sir Andrew Balfour in Khartoum during the period 1902 to 1913. He became the first director of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories with distinguished publications in tropical medicine. His energetic sanitary work culminated in declaring Khartoum mosquito free by 1910. Following his return to the United Kingdom he became the first Director of London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1923. He was also elected President of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (1925-1927).

The third Historic Perspectives article gives a glimpse of the outstanding career of the late Prof Tigani El Mahi (1911-1970), the “Father of African Psychiatry” and statesman, whose knowledge prevailed over a broad spectrum of disciplines other than psychiatry, including anthropology, sociology, history, archeology, linguistics, poetry, fine arts and folklore [13]. The Republished Article of his student and disciple, Prof Taha Baasher (1922-2008), also an international pillar of psychiatry [13], which constitutes the first component to the first Tigani El Mahi Memorial Lecture, brightly testifies to his encyclopedic knowledge. In this memorial lecture delivered at the 4th Pan African Psychiatric Congress at Abidjan, Ivory Coast (June 1975), Prof. Baasher stated that “Dr. V. Neales once Professor of Paediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum, addressed Tigani after a series of discussions by saying; “You could not have acquired all this in your lifetime.....you must have lived twice to do so.” And he was right.”

In his article on “Food Customs and Cultural Taboos”, Prof Tigani El Mahi gives an elegant account of food in relation to civilizations, anthropology, medical ailments, allergies and child health. In a visionary statement he drew attention to the danger of estranging people through the influence of “modernization” from their national diets which stood the test of time. He also emphasized the importance of studying the nutritional value of local food items. Decades

later, his suggestions were realized by the development of snack meal for school children from some local Sudanese common fruits with high level of proteins, energy value and vitamin C, and also excellent quantities of iron, phosphorous and calcium [23].

The second Republished Article on “Family and Child Welfare in Relation to Urbanization” gives an elegant historical account of urbanization, community development, nutrition, schooling, maternity health, and home environment in relation to child welfare. He emphasized that “physical development of the child is extremely important for his intellectual and emotional development” and that “in any case, the physical cannot be separated from the mental”.

In his report on a visit to Saudi Arabia (September 1959) as EMRO Advisor on Mental Health, he did not only discuss the mental health issue during his visit to Taif Mental Hospital and other hospitals in Mecca, Medina and Jeddah, but highlighted as well other medical problems. He addressed heat effects during Pilgrimage season and contacted (on arrival to Khartoum) Prof. Dean A. Smith, Head of Physiology Department and Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Khartoum who replied by making a protocol for management of heat stroke during the pilgrimage seasons with references on heat illness. He also inspected school health services and went back in history to observe that the *Dracunculus medinensis*, Guinea worm disease, “so called because of its supposed prevalence in Medina in the past, is so rarely seen today.” As an authority in history of Arab Medicine, he found it “perhaps appropriate to mention that Rhazes was the first to suggest its parasitic nature and to refer to water as a possible medium of propagation and that Avicenna described it as an “extruded tendon which is the basis of the etymology of the term Al Irk Al Madiani”. It’s noteworthy that Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037 AD), in his first detailed description named the disease “irk el medina”, which translates as “worm or nerve of medina”, in reference to the holy city of Medina (Arabia)

[24].

The last part of this SJP issue consists of the reproduced Cover and Editorial, written by one of us (MOS) in 1970, with an obituary of the late Tigani El Mahi in *Al hakeem*, Journal of the Medical Students Association, the University of Khartoum (U of K). This is followed by a poem (in Arabic) written by one of us (MAMS), in the same issue of *Al hakeem*, as an elegy to his memory. *Al hakeem*, which translates from Arabic as wise one or doctor, is the official

journal of the medical students at the Faculty of Medicine, U of K. Established in the early 1960s, it continued to publish original articles mainly written by medical students, with some contribution from the teaching staff and health professionals. Several of the late Prof Tigani El Mahi's articles were published in this journal. As an endeavor to provide medical students with a platform to express themselves and publish their scientific communication, *Al hakeem* stands out as one of the earliest of its kind worldwide.

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