

EDITORIAL

Commitment to the wellbeing of children worldwide

This issue of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SPJ) depicts a continuum of its set goals which merge the past, through the present, towards the future wellbeing of children worldwide.

The Cover reflects part of Sudan civilization and shows scripts of the Meroitic Kingdom (800BC-350AD) which spread along the Nile Valley for a distance of more than 1000 km [1]. This was kept besides the Arabic script of the “Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics”, reflecting also the current main culture of Sudan. A happy Sudanese baby is also shown reaching out, a gesture of a healthy future development.

The first original article in this issue reports on the patterns and factors affecting childhood feeding practices and highlights, for the first time, a significant association between the frequency of qat (khat) chewing by mothers and childhood mortality. Qat chewing is a social habit widely practiced in Yemen and some countries of the Horn of Africa, including Somalia and Ethiopia [2]. Fresh green leaves of the plant are chewed over a period of time for their stimulant properties. Historically, the plant was indigenous to Ethiopia and the East African Coast, and was subsequently cultured in the highlands of Yemen. Omer and associates (page 14-20, this issue) postulated that the active ingredient in qat (an amphetamine-like substance) may have serious consequences on the child through breastfeeding, noting that amphetamine is known to be concentrated in breastmilk. Another explanation offered by the Authors is that this time-consuming habit may lead to child neglect by the mother. It is noteworthy that the adverse economic impact of qat has been highlighted about 50 years ago by the late Professor Tigani El

Mahi (1911-1970), former Professor of Psychiatric Medicine, University of Khartoum (U of K), and Member and Rotational President of the Supreme Council of State (The Presidential Council of Sudan). These were written when he was the Regional Advisor in Mental Health (1956-1964) to the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office [3, 4]. Professor El Mahi [4] stated that economic consideration of qat should “weigh heavily for it is difficult to reconcile the irrigated areas devoted by certain countries to growing khat (a very profitable crop commercially) and the amounts allotted by other for its importation, with the present need for productive development and rise in nutritional standards of developing countries”. The economic toll of qat is particularly hard on African Horn Countries who have been, and are currently, hit with series of famines, with children suffering the most. It is interesting to note that the first author of this article (page 14, this issue), Professor Mohamed Ibrahim A. Omer, is a prototype of a paediatrician committed to the wellbeing of children worldwide. During his service at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Khartoum, he was the first Convenor of Postgraduate Board of Paediatrics and later the Director of Postgraduate Medical Studies Board. He also served as Editor-in-Chief for SJP and as President of the Sudan Association of Paediatricians (SAP). When he moved (in 1990) to the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Sana’a University in Yemen, he headed the Department of Paediatrics and had a pivotal role in organizing paediatric teaching and research in collaboration with UNICEF, as well as curricula for the Faculty of Medical Sciences. Moving to Al-Qassim Province in the central part of Saudi Arabia

(1993), he headed the Department of Paediatrics in Buraydah (the capital of the province), and initiated and maintained a flourishing postgraduate training. Since 1999 he works at the Unit of Child Health, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Trinidad and Tobago in West Indies, providing major contributions to teaching and child health care. In July 2011, he was the External Examiner for the final exam of the Clinical MD in Paediatrics and Child Health degree of Sudan. The other articles in this issue reflect the themes adopted in the preceding one. They include a study dealing with pneumonia, one of the world leading causes of childhood mortality, and another suggesting the use of modified donkey's milk-based formula as a substitute for patients with cow's milk protein

allergy. These add to an original article, from Clinical MD in Paediatrics and Child Health (U of K) thesis, dealing with infection and immunity in severe childhood malnutrition. There is also a review article on the treatment strategies of acute metabolic disorders in neonates and miscellaneous case reports including accidental ingestions of button batteries and congenital and genetic disorders.

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