

## **Letter to the Editor**

### **MEASLES: STILL THE BIGGEST KILLER**

Sir,

While undertaking a children's study in northern Sudan, 13 villages were visited along the east and west banks of the River Nile. The classical picture of undernutrition and disease typical of many developing countries is coupled with particular features. Early marriage of girls and short birth interval are characteristic. Infertility poses a problem. Abrupt weaning of infants when the mother gets pregnant is the practice. The result of these are diarrhoea and malnutrition; both difficult to manage in this area. All one to five year old children measured (randomly selected) were found to fall in the red portion of the Shakir strip.

The vicious cycle of malnutrition and infection is well demonstrated in this area. Measles seems to be the major killer. I was reminded of the old Arabic saying: 'count your children after measles'. During the week prior to the survey, 11 children from one family died from the disease in the village of Gubarab (population 1200). This was no surprise to the people. A look at the cemetery of the village was enough proof of the high mortality due to measles. Rows of small new graves were to be seen and the people blamed measles. Such disasters are often overlooked by health professionals when persuading parents to consider limiting their families.

There is no immunization available and little in the way of health services. We can only hope that the efforts of government supported by the Expanded Programme of Immunization of W.H.O. can bring hope to these families.

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