

EDITORIAL

From neonatology to pediatric neurology: believing in and working for a bright future

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Eight countries from three continents contributed articles to the current issue of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SJP). The articles spread through the fields of infectious diseases, pulmonology, immunology, endocrinology and metabolism, neurology, psychology, radiology, pediatric intensive care, and ethics.

However, neonatology stands out in a review article from the United Kingdom (UK) on feeding growth restricted premature neonates and its challenges; and its climax is told in the section on *Historical Perspectives* [1]. This highlights the story of preterm identical twins who were admitted in 1990 to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at King Khalid University Hospital (KKUH), College of Medicine, King Saud University (KSU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Born at 33 weeks of gestation, with birth weight of 2,000 g and 1,900 g, respectively, they managed to join later one of us (MAMS) as residents in the Saudi Board of Pediatric Neurology Residency Program at King Saud University! The story vividly tells the visionary thinking and dedicated hard work behind the establishment of pediatric subspecialties in this Region of the World.

Professor Abdelwahab T. H. Elidrissy [2], Founding Dean, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Omdurman Islamic University, Sudan

is one of those behind this success story. In a congratulatory letter, in February 2010 (Figure 1), to the Rector of KSU, Riyadh on the high position which KSU received in the World ranking of universities, he highlighted how the NICU at KSU started. In 1981, the new College of Medicine building and King Khalid University Hospital were established to become the main teaching campus and patient service facility. Previously, medical teaching and services were performed at the Ministry of Health Hospital in Shumaisi, Riyadh (currently, King Saud Medical Complex) [3]. However, the inauguration of the university hospital was delayed due to technical reasons, mainly related to the operating rooms. It was Prof. Elidrissy, being Chairman of the Pediatric Department, who managed to convince the College of Medicine Council, during a special meeting that the pediatric services can be partly moved, and the surgical cases can be transferred by ambulance to the Ministry of Health Hospital in Shumaisi, Riyadh (Figure 1). In 1982, the dedicated university hospital was opened [4], starting with the Departments of Pediatrics and Medicine, and was named King Khalid University Hospital, coinciding with the 25th Anniversary of KSU. Actually, Prof. Elidrissy declared in his letter in February 2010 (Figure 1) that his newborn son (Mohamed, PhD student

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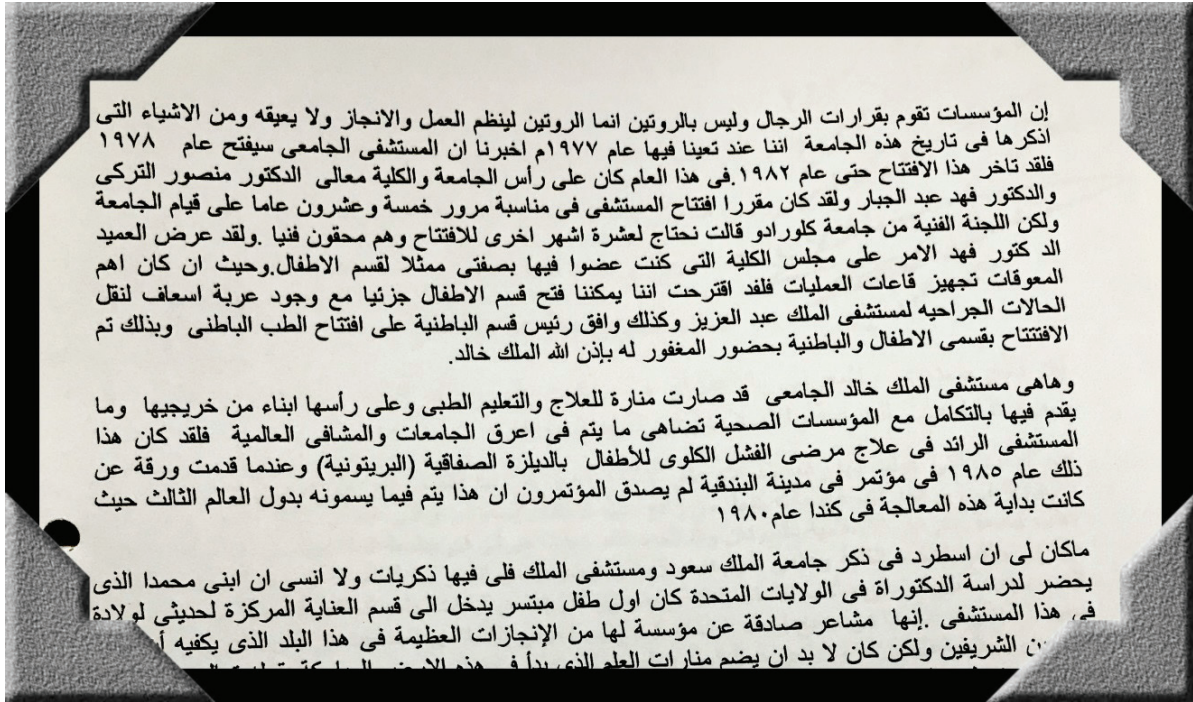


Figure 1. Congratulatory letter (in Arabic, February 2010) from Professor Abdelwahab T. H. Elidripsy [2] to the Rector of King Saud University (KSU), Riyadh highlighting how the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at King Khalid University Hospital, College of Medicine, KSU started.

in USA) was the first preterm to be admitted to the NICU at King Khalid University Hospital. Prof. Elidripsy is also a founder of pediatric nephrology subspecialty in Saudi Arabia, and contributed to the establishment and held the position of Chairman and Professor of Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics, College of Medicine, Taibah University, Almadinah Almunawwarah, Saudi Arabia.

The establishment of neonatology and its services in our region of the World required both visionary thinking and stamina, given the tremendous challenges of the logistics. In a historic study by Professor Mohamed Ibrahim A. Omer [5,6], who established the first neonatal unit at Khartoum Teaching Hospital and pioneered Neonatology in Sudan, respiratory distress syndrome contributed to 40.3% of the deaths during the year 1972, and the mortality approached 100% in babies weighing less than 908 g [6].

In the late 1970s, Prof. Omer managed to bring the first two incubators in Sudan, as a donation from a drug company. These were allocated at the NICU of Soba University Hospital (SUH), the

teaching hospital for the Faculty of Medicine, the University of Khartoum (U of K) [7]. A special ceremony and decorations were arranged for this special occasion, and one of us (MAMS) was among the pediatric registrars in the organizing group. The Late Professor Hadad Omer Karoum (1930–2017) [8], Director, SUH and pioneering obstetrician and teacher (renowned for his witty remarks and pleasant sense of humor) was invited to lead the inauguration. Standing beside one of the incubators looking at the preterm baby inside, he exchanged one of his witty remarks as he addressed Prof. Omer saying: “For us this looks like an abortion!”

Follow up studies from the NICU at King Khalid University Hospital, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia proved what Prof. Elidripsy believed in and worked for. The corrected perinatal mortality rate over 15-year-period (1994–2008), an important indicator of the level of health-care provided to the mother and her fetus was found to be 11.9/1,000, comparable to the North American and European rates [9]. In another study [10], the majority (85.6%) of very low birth-weight infants

(birth weight of 1,000–1,500 g) delivered at King Khalid University Hospital, between 1997 and 2014, had normal cognitive function at the corrected age of 24–36 months.

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