

## Editorial

# Paediatric neurology at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles

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Accompanying the recent rapid progress in paediatric neurosciences, the gap between the developed and resource poor countries widened significantly regarding the possibilities for diagnosis and intervention [1]. The majority of children with disabilities live in resource-poor countries with higher burden of both medical and social sequel, accompanied by scarce qualified personnel and set up services. There is an alarmingly significant gap both in the identification of neurodevelopmental disorders with serious implications, like autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and the provision of the needed health and social services for these disorders [2,3].

Based on a survey of paediatric neurology services in 15 African countries, the International Child Neurology Association (ICNA) identified training and education at all levels to be the key areas of need [4]. Through the participation of delegates from 30 African countries, a workshop sponsored by ICNA was held in Accra, Ghana in 2014 to analyze the state of ASD diagnosis and management [5]. Following a presentation by Prof. Haydar Elhadi Babikir, Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Gezira, both Prof. Harry Chugani (President of ICNA, 2010-2014)

and Prof. Jo Wilmshurst (Secretary of ICNA, 2010-2014) expressed the willingness of ICNA to hold an educational meeting in Khartoum. As requested by Prof. Haydar E. Babikir, one of us (M.A.M.S) discussed this further with Prof. Chugani and Prof. Wilmshurst during the 13th International Child Neurology Congress in Brazil (May 2014). This laid the foundation for the educational meeting to be a reality, followed by commendable hard work by Prof. Haydar E. Babiker and the Organizing Committees including the paediatric neurologists in Sudan, to prepare the logistics for this meeting.

The current issue of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SJP) includes a special supplement to reflect on and document these important events for paediatricians and childhood services in Sudan [6]. This paediatric neurology event, which targeted specialists, general paediatricians, neurologists, physicians, nurses and para-medical staff, took place during the period January 27-31, 2015 in Khartoum at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles [7]. It started with the Paediatric Epilepsy Training Course Level 1 (PET1), organized by the British Paediatric Association (BPNA) and sponsored by Sadaqat

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Charity Organization of Sudan. The course was the first of its nature to be conducted at Soba University Hospital, University of Khartoum (U of K) and was attended by 48 general paediatricians who arrived to the Capital Khartoum, and represented most of Sudan provinces [7].

The main ICNA teaching congress was conducted in 2 days by speakers from Belgium, India, Jordan, Kenya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and USA. The speakers included 7 Sudanese paediatric neurologists working in countries of the Arabian Peninsula. The presenters belonged to various disciplines including paediatric and adult neurology, psychiatry and neurosurgery. A team of speech, language and occupational therapists, led by Sudanese-born Dr. Nazim Haidar, Developmental Paediatrician, London NHS Trust shared with a symposium in continuity with their ongoing program for training Sudanese speech and language therapists [8]. Local papers regarding the pattern of the paediatric neurological disorders and paediatric neurology service in Sudan were presented by 4 paediatric neurologists. In conjunction with Dr Hayat Osman Abdalla and Dr Haitham El Bashir (Qatar), the London NHS Trust group conducted the autism, communication disorders and neurodisability sessions on the 29th and 30th of January 2015 to a targeted audience.

The Conference was jointly organized by ICNA, the African Child Neurology Association (ACNA)

and the Sudanese Society of Neuroscience (SSNS). It was sponsored by the Sudanese Association of Paediatricians (SAP) with the patronage of the Minister of Health, Khartoum State.

That great work would not have been possible were it not for the Organizing Committees and for Sadaqat Charity Organization of Sudan driven by the enthusiasm displayed by its manager, Nazim Sirag and all the team behind the scenes [7]. It is noteworthy that members of Sadaqat Charity Organization, who belong to different professions, are gracefully offering their time and energy, on voluntary basis, for the wellbeing of children and adults in Sudan. The conference organization dynamic group of residents, junior doctors and medical students also had their great impact [6].

Reflections on this spectacular meeting were summarized in an e-mail sent to Dr Maha A. Elseed, Member of the Organizing Committees [7], by Dr Alice Jollands, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist and Member of The North Scotland Child and Adolescent Neurology Network (NeSCANN) [9] after her safe arrival home, more than 5000 kilometers from Khartoum: *“The local team’s enthusiasm for improving epilepsy care and neurology service in Sudan is to be commended. With such dedication there can only be a brighter future for children with neurological diseases and children in general in Sudan. We have been treated like royalty and enjoyed your very warm and genuine hospitality.”*

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