

Editorial

Managing the common and rare in paediatrics

Continuing its set goals towards the future well-being of children, this issue of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SJP) addresses management of the common and rare.

The first review article highlights the causes, management and outcome of congenital hypothyroidism (CH), which is the commonest preventable cause of mental retardation worldwide. It also calls for a national screening programme in Sudan. Congenital hypothyroidism can result from maternal iodine deficiency which has been ascertained epidemiologically in Sudan since the 1960s [1]. Studies to document the aberrant thyroid function in children with goitre from Darfur, an endemic goitre region of the Sudan, were undertaken as early as 1975 and published in SJP in 1984 [2]. Among the authors of this article were Prof Mohamed Ibrahim A Omer (Ex-President of Sudan Association of Paediatricians, and former Editor-in-Chief of SJP)[3]; and the Late Prof James H Hutchison [4] who was President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow from 1966 to 1968 and of the British Paediatric Association, 1969 to 1970. Considering primary causes of CH, thyroid dysgenesis has also been highlighted in a previous issue of SJP [5]. Endemic iodine deficiency was also documented biochemically in Sudan since the 1980s [6,7], and the remarkably high prevalence of congenital and juvenile endemic hypothyroidism has been ascertained since early 1990s in Darfur Region [8]. It has been estimated that iodine deficiency affects yearly 200,000 children born in Sudan, 3% of whom may develop cretinism, 10% severe intellectual impairment and 87% less severe intellectual

disability [9]. The promising outcome of CH, when early detected and promptly treated, speaks for the relevance and importance of a national screening programme, as well as the importance of other effective measures to address iodine deficiency in the community.

The second review article covers the management of wheeze, a common symptom in pre-school children. About a third of children wheeze at least once before the age of 3 years and 2% require hospital admission. This article also highlights, with imaging illustrations, the differential diagnosis including foreign body inhalation which is common in children under 3 years of age; and the autosomal recessively inherited primary ciliary dyskinesia (PCD) with an estimated incidence of 1:16,000 individuals in Norway and Japan. The incidence may be higher in populations with a high rate of consanguinity, such as those living in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa (including Sudan) [10, 11].

The third review article introduces a new section on "Education and Practice", and highlights the vastly growing subject of evidence based medicine (EBM). It also introduces a practical application of EBM in the real life in a situation when the available evidence is limited.

Two interesting original articles reflect on social paediatrics. The first describes the growing role of Sudanese female doctors in paediatrics. Of 146 paediatricians, 37 (77%) were females, 30 of whom (41%) were in the academic career. It's noteworthy that the first two Sudanese female doctors graduated in 1952, approximately 3 decades after establishing the first medical school in Sudan,

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which later became the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Khartoum (U of K). The article also highlights that for various socio-cultural reasons, female doctors in Sudan do not achieve their full potential professional and academic achievements.

The second article estimated and discussed the relatively high prevalence (13.6%) of smoking among adolescents in primary and secondary schools in Khartoum State. It also highlighted smoking habits among school adolescents and suggested means for intervention including more emphasis on public health education.

The third Original Article focusses on school health. Visual acuity screening was conducted on 400 primary school pupils in Nigeria using the HOTV protocol, and 2.5 % were identified to have poor monocular vision. Because of its easy usage, the Authors recommended that the HOTV protocol be adopted by school health programmes especially for the primary school pupils.

An original article from Clinical MD in Paediatrics and Child Health thesis, U of K defines for the first time the pattern and outcome of childhood renal diseases in Sudan. In a large cohort of 150 hospitalized children in four teaching hospitals in Khartoum State, urinary tract infection (UTI) was the commonest (20%) among 200 ascertained renal diagnoses. This was followed by urolithiasis (15.5%), comparable to reports from Saudi Arabia, possibly related to the hot weather, and/or nutritional or genetic factors. Both are potentially treatable conditions requiring early diagnosis and management.

In the "Case Report" section, one article described the rare occurrence of chronic immune thrombocytopenia which responded only to thrombopoietin receptor agonist. The second described the management of a child who had recurrent Kawasaki disease, with reported rates between 0.8% in the United States and 3% in Japan.

The third article reported on a Sudanese patient with Meckel-Gruber syndrome, diagnosed by antenatal ultrasound scan, and discussed the ethical perspectives regarding antenatal management of lethal genetic disorders.

The most spectacular rarity in this issue of SJP was that

of Rital and Ritaj, the Sudanese craniopagus conjoined twins who were born and had their early neonatal management at Soba University Hospital, Khartoum. Craniopagus twins (CPT) i.e. twins joined at the head are a rare malformation found once in 2.5 million live births and represent only 2–6% of conjoined twins. The girls' parents, who are both doctors, contacted the charity organization "Facing the World" through the BBC who made all the necessary arrangements to transfer the twins to the United Kingdom with their parents, and organized all the logistics and paid for the surgery [12]. Facing the World (<http://facingtheworld.net>) is a unique UK charity that provides life-changing craniofacial surgery to some of the world's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. This case report highlights commitment to manage even the rare, through seeking international expertise and facilities. In this respect, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should also be credited for paving the way for several conjoined twins, from different nationalities including Sudanese, to lead a normal life following separation surgery in the Kingdom [13].

"Historical Perspectives" section in this SJP issue honors the work of Sir Robert Archibald, a pioneer of tropical medicine in Sudan. Dr Robert Archibald led the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories in Khartoum in its last and most fruitful years, 1920 to 1934. The work of Archibald was recognized by a knighthood conferred on him in 1934, being the only doctor to receive the accolade while still in the Sudan service. He studied meningitis and Kala-azar in the East, Sleeping Sickness in the South, bilharzia and Tsetse flies in the Nuba Mountains in the West and bilharzia in Dongola Province in the North of Sudan. Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to the Executive Committee of the Sudan Association of Paediatricians (November 2011 – October 2013), Dr Amani Nuri, and Members of the National and International Boards for the valuable efforts and support that kept the SJP thriving and fulfilling its set goals.

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