A message from Pediatric Annals’ Editor-in-Chief

A Sleepy Topic
Stanford T. Shulman, MD

Highlighted in this month’s issue of Pediatric Annals is the topic Sleep Disorders in Children, guest edited by Stephen H. Sheldon, DO, FAAP, an expert in this field. Sleep-disordered breathing and obstructive sleep apnea are two aspects of this topic, and are common indications for adenotonsillectomy. It should be noted that tonsillectomy is not indicated solely for recurrent strep throat (see the 2012 Infectious Diseases Society of American Guidelines on Streptococcal Pharyngitis available online). Additionally, recent evidence has highlighted the importance of avoiding codeine specifically in children after tonsillectomy, adenoidectomy, or both, because of the recently recognized risk of death or life-threatening respiratory depression associated with codeine use in these patients. This appears to be due to the ultra-rapid metabolism of codeine to morphine in 1% to 15% of the population, its frequency varying depending on the ethnic group. This has led to a new FDA requirement for all codeine-containing products to add a boxed warning to their product labeling regarding this serious adverse reaction.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERVENTION

On an unrelated topic that has been featured in the news and other media recently are two studies that emphasize the benefit of high-quality early-childhood (first 5 years of life) intervention programs for disadvantaged children as reflected by very long-term outcomes and successes in life. These long-ago studies from 1962 to 1967 and 1972 to 1977, respectively, (the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project in Michigan, and the Abecedarian Project in North Carolina) provided more intensive pre-school interventions by more highly trained teachers than subsequently used by Head Start programs.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist James J. Heckman argues in a recent New York Times commentary that the economic and social benefits, as shown in these two studies, repay the costs of the programs up to 12 times over.

In the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, 123 poor African-American children were enrolled; half were given high quality pre-school education at 3 and 4 years of age by teachers with bachelor’s degrees, focusing on active learning and problem solving. Thirty-seven-year follow-up (with 94% compliance) by researchers blinded to group assignment showed the intervention group to have 40% higher incomes, a greater likelihood of holding a steady job, higher rates of home ownership, higher levels of education, fewer arrests and social service interventions, and higher levels of health insurance compared with the control group. The return to society was $12 for every dollar spent.

Similarly, the Carolina Abecedarian Project enrolled 111 infants (98% African-American) born from 1972 to 1977 and provided high-quality intervention to half of the enrollees for 6 to 8 hours per day 5 days per week for 4 years, emphasizing game-based education, with the other half serving as controls. At ages 21 years and 30 years, the intervention group had superior accomplishments in education (4 times higher college graduation rates), employment (74% versus 53% employed for the past 2 years), teen pregnancy avoidance (20% versus 45%), lack of receipt of public welfare (4% versus 20%), decreased criminal activity, and improved health measures.

Heckman concludes that our current educational programs do not start early enough and that high-quality (but expensive) early-childhood programs for disadvantaged kids “foster human flourishing,” improve our economic productivity, and will help to reduce inequality in society.

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An avid stamp collector, Dr. Shulman chooses relevant stamps from his personal collection to accompany his column each month.

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in both the short and long run. That’s a lot to ponder.

THIS MONTH’S STAMPS

The four stamps selected for this column reflect international movements to improve health, especially child health. The blood red Argentinian stamp was issued on June 14, 2011, for World Blood Donor Day, an annual event since 2001 sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO). Its goal is 100% volunteer (non-compensated) donors worldwide. In low-income countries, 65% of donated blood goes to children younger than 5 years old. The 2011 stamp from India honors Smile Train, the world’s largest cleft charity. Founded in 1999, its mission is to help local medical teams to provide safe and free surgery for poor patients with cleft lip and/or cleft palate, now reaching 87 countries, with local doctors providing 100% free care. Smile Train has trained more than 650,000 eye-care professionals and built 315 eye hospitals enabling better eyecare for more 100 million individuals.5

The 2012 Nepalese stamp with the large eye honors The Lions Clubs’ Blindness Prevention Campaign. The Lions Clubs, founded in 1917 in Chicago by businessman Melvin Jones, became international in 1920 and was challenged by Helen Keller in 1925 to become “knights of the blind in the crusade against blindness.” It now has more than 46,000 clubs with 1.35 million members and is the world’s largest service club organization, raising $415 million since 1990. It has distributed 10 million doses of azithromycin in Ethiopia to treat and prevent trachoma, more than 147 million doses of ivermectin in 15 countries to prevent oncocerciasis (river blindness), and has provided 8 million cataract operations. The Lions have trained more than 650,000 eye-care professionals and built 315 eye hospitals enabling better eyecare for more 100 million individuals.5

The 2012 Bangladeshi stamp celebrates Rotary International’s 75 years of work in Bangladesh. Rotary was founded in Chicago in 1905 by Paul Harris and three others, to provide services, promote international goodwill and understanding, and peace. Now based in my town, Evanston, IL, Rotary became international in 1911. In 1985 it launched Polio Plus with the goal to immunize all the world’s children against polio. By 2011, Rotary had raised more than $900 million to immunize two billion (!) children against polio worldwide, and is cited by WHO and the UN as the key private partner in polio eradication.6

These four groups have certainly impacted health positively worldwide, especially child health, and deserve all the recognition they can get, and more! ■

REFERENCES