

Health problems in childhood: challenges from treatment to prevention

This thematic publication “Health problems in childhood: challenges from treatment to prevention” contains important information on a new pediatrics which now has its place within extended health care from embryos to adults.

Here diverse themes are addressed: Study related to effectiveness of neonatal programs, mouth health in childhood, analysis of prevalence of worsening of children’s health, determinants of children mortality, accident prevention, breastfeeding of premature babies, school health, humanization in neonatal ICU, care of children with chronic diseases, eating disorders in children, notification of maltreatment, palliative child care, among others.

This collection of articles needs to be placed within context. In the past four decades, there were significant changes in the Brazilian demographical and epidemiological scenario amongst which the following are highlighted: accelerated urbanization process, decrease of fertility, infantile birth and death rates, and increase in life expectancy. Despite this demographic transition, the population contingent of children and adolescents in Brazil is still high, what justifies a careful look into these age ranges.

There is a new reality related to the child health around the world: rates for maternal breast feeding and access to prenatal treatment have increased. However, the number of premature births has also increased as well as obesity incidence and children with chronic diseases.

The access to modern and sophisticated technologies has allowed the increase in the survival of children who would not have survived before – extreme premature babies, bearers of congenital malformation and chronic diseases, such as cystic fibrosis and imperfect osteogeneses. Thus, a new clientele was created which requires peculiar level of care: children depend on technology.

The influence of the new population and epidemiological reality in short and long term for the health sector and the costs for the society still isn’t well determined, mainly because many infantile health aspects are not aligned to adults’ health. For example, assistance to children dependant on technology has led parents to a peregrination seeking integral assistance. The health system is not ready for such type of care. And if children are not immediately treated, their performance in adult life and society will be affected.

In this number, a cohort study about the periodontal problems in childhood that we point out as responsible for increasing two to seven times the risk of cardiovascular disease is highlighted. And another study which warns us about the fact that prevention of chronic and degenerative diseases in adults, such as eating habits and lifestyle, needs to be approached still during childhood.

Everything that has been pointed out here requires a new paradigm for the formation of pediatricists and other professionals who treat children. If access to modern technologies and practices based on evidences improve the capacity for diagnostic and opportunities of prevention and treatment, they do not guarantee the integrity of a developing human being.

In short, the articles published herein refer to this new child who presents to the health professional as: a child that with their current knowledge could live for a hundred years, but that still doesn’t have access to the care needed for their life expectancy to increase.

Maria Elisabeth Lopes Moreira

Guest editor