

Insight

Child Neurology from Slovenia at Al-Sabah Children's Hospital – 15 Years of Shared and Mutual Experience

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ABSTRACT

This is a report on the co-operation programme between Slovenia and Kuwait that was established at the end of seventies. It initially included neurological sciences (such as neurophysiology and neurosurgery), plastic and reconstructive surgery. It was further expanded in the mid eighties to include paediatric specialities as well. It is the field of child neurology that has been, during the past

fifteen years, one of the most flourishing programmes. It has helped in upgrading clinical, educational and scientific knowledge and, at the same time, in establishing firm friendship and confidentiality. Some of the experiences we have shared together during this period are mentioned in the report. However much more has been encountered but definitely exceeds the scope of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Consultant exchange programmes between the Department of Developmental, Child and Adolescent Neurology at University Children's Hospital in Ljubljana, Slovenia and Child Neurology Unit at the Childrens' Department of Al-Sabah Hospital in Kuwait started in the years 1985/1986. Such type of exchanges had been started a decade before, after the Agreement Act between University Medical Center Ljubljana and Ministry of Health in Kuwait (so called Ljubljana Programme). The first clinical consultants came to work in Kuwait during short visits lasting from 4 to 6 months. Such kind of consultation programmes were gradually established in the fields of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery and Burns, Clinical Neurophysiology, Neurosurgery, Anesthesiology, Orthopedics, ENT, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation and finally in Paediatrics. The latter included Neonatology, Child Neurology and Paediatric Intensive Care.

The exchange programme included consultant help in Kuwait, treatment of Kuwaiti patients sent to the different departments in Ljubljana University Medical Center and the training of young doctors from Kuwait for Board Certification at Ljubljana University Medical Faculty. Kuwait Institute of Medical Specialisation recognised this board certification.

In the field of Paediatrics 5 doctors from Kuwait were trained at Ljubljana University Children's Hospital. Four consultant child neurologists and

four consultants in paediatric intensive care from Ljubljana came for consultations at Children's Department in Kuwait on a regular basis. Some of the most important clinical and educational issues in the field of child neurology are mentioned in this report.

REPORT

Over the past fifteen years we have experienced and resolved many interesting clinical, scientific as well as technological problems. We have had many fruitful discussions. We even went through two calamities: the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 and the 10-days' liberation war for the independence of Slovenia from former Yugoslavia in June 1991.

We have actively participated together at 12 International Scientific Medical Congresses in Kuwait, in Slovenia as well as elsewhere abroad. We have shared authorship in 15 scientific articles published in gulf medical journals, in medical journals in Slovenia as well as in distinguished international journals. Some of the most important papers are mentioned in references 1 to 10.

We have trained paediatricians in the field of child neurology, child neurophysiology and developmental paediatrics in our different divisions at Ljubljana University Childrens' Hospital. This has included everyday routine clinical work in the ward for infants and toddlers, the ward for school children and adolescents up to the age of 18 years. These wards admit over 2000

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children yearly. In the Out-patient Clinic and Out-patient Department for Developmental Neurology nearly 5000 paediatric patients are seen yearly. The Developmental Department has its own outpatient division and tertiary care neurodevelopmental treatment unit. Two experienced senior Bobath tutors take care of around 500 children with cerebral palsy yearly.

In the modern and well-equipped unit for clinical neurophysiology 3000 patients are assessed yearly. The assessment includes bedside digital electroencephalography, videoelectroencephalography, polysomnography, videotelemetry and evoked potentials. There is a separate unit for cognitive neuropsychology.

For educational purposes we are regularly organising two 6-months' duration post-graduate courses (in Child Neurology and Neurodevelopmental Treatment - Bobath Concept) for doctors and other paramedical personnel involved in the diagnosis and management of disabled children. Both courses are internationally certified (CME/CPD approved by European Pediatric Neurology Society and Bobath Centre Certificate respectively). In Ljubljana we have organised during the past few years, many important International and European meetings, symposia and congresses on the topic of child neurology. The most outstanding were: European Congress of Clinical Neurophysiology, 1st International Symposium on Neurodevelopmental treatment (NDT), 8th International Child Neurology Association (ICNA) Congress, 26th UMEMPS (Union of Middle East and Mediterranean Pediatric Societies) Congress, 5th International Congress of Cerebral Palsy. Many more have been programmed (Congress on NDT in 2004 and European Congress of Child Neurology in 2007). The participation of our Kuwaiti colleagues at these congresses has been outstanding. We have recently been appointed for the organisation of all child neurology symposia within IPOKRATES, which is the international organisation responsible for postgraduate studies and knowledge transfer as well as scientific research in the field of paediatrics, with the main office in Mannheim, Germany (www.IPOKRATES.de). We are also responsible for the ICNA website where all the information about the mentioned congresses can be obtained (<http://www.iskratel.si/icna/>). We do hope that our excellent co-operation with the Child Neurology Unit at Sabah Children's Hospital will continue.

Our Centre for Epilepsy is taking care of around 2000 children and adolescents with epilepsy in Slovenia yearly. The Centre is fully equipped with modern diagnostic techniques which include videotelemetry, SPECT, PET, functional MRI and

MR. The consultations for epilepsy are managed by competent doctors that advise for the optimum treatment and the possibility of epilepsy surgery abroad. There is close cooperation between our centre and other centres in Europe.

DISCUSSION

During the past fifteen years we have seen together many interesting clinical cases. A rare case of torsion dystonia (idiopathic dystonia musculorum deformans), an extremely rare extrapyramidal disorder observed during childhood, was recently seen^[1]. We have jointly described with colleagues from Ibn Sina Hospital a girl with central nervous system tuberculomas in whom neurosurgical intervention was necessary^[2]. Recently another two rare disease entities were described: a case of merosine-negative congenital muscular dystrophy^[3] and a family with an inborn error of folate metabolism, the so called type III homocystinuria^[4].

We have designed and successfully realised retrospective as well as prospective collaborative studies on children with subacute sclerosing panencephalitis^[5,6], childhood hemiplegia^[7], febrile seizures^[8] and cerebral palsy^[9]. In cooperation with colleagues from Adult Neurology and Neurophysiology Unit at Ibn Sina Hospital we have been the first to publish results on EMG and single-fibre EMG in neonatal tetanus^[10]. Finally our own individual experiences and feelings about Kuwait and Medical Services in Kuwait were mentioned in two articles in Slovenian language (L. Cindro-Heberle in *Medicinski Razgledi*, 1998 and D. Neubauer in *ISIS - The official Journal of Medical Chamber of Slovenia*, 2001).

It was an extremely rich period of co-operation and we think that there are not many similar consultant programmes elsewhere. Over the past years the majority of the above mentioned programmes between Ljubljana and Kuwait have gradually stopped. The only surviving programme is the one on Child Neurology where two consultants occasionally come for their expertise to the Childrens' Department, Unit of Child Neurology, Kuwait.

In conclusion we can say that over the past 15 years these exchange programmes have contributed greatly to clinical, educational and scientific experiences in both Slovenia and Kuwait.

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