

Health Briefs

by LAURIE LARSON
News Writer

Chronic illness discrimination

Parents of children with chronic illnesses often perceive discrimination against their children, according to a study in the November/December 1994 *Pediatric Nursing*.

In a survey of 365 caregivers with chronically ill children, ages 10 to 12 years, 35 percent of respondents, mostly mothers, perceived that they and their children were discriminated against by their children's peers, school staff and other social/public facilities' staffs.

School staff-related discrimination, including exclusion from activities and unwillingness to deal with children's dietary and care needs, accounted for 55 percent of perceived barriers. Ridicule and rejection by children's peers, during and outside school, accounted for 36 percent of perceived discrimination. Exclusion from organized sports and groups such as Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, as well as from amusement parks and resorts, comprised 6.5 percent perceived discrimination.

Chronic illnesses listed by children's caregivers included asthma, congenital heart disease, neuromuscular disorders, diabetes, seizure disorders, renal disorders, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis/systemic lupus, sickle cell anemia/blood disorders and cystic fibrosis.

Researchers recommended that health care providers record chronically ill children's daily activities to determine and be sensitive to potential discrimination problems. They advised using social-skills training to increase children's competence in mainstream activities, raise their self-confidence and combat discrimination.

Vitamin A and HIV transmission

Vitamin A deficiency in an HIV-positive pregnant women triples or quadruples chances that she will transmit

Shunned: Discrimination against chronically ill children

19% reported that teacher behavior was either over-protective or too forceful

Research shows integration occurs with **structured** intervention, not happenstance



14% reported name-calling, isolation, and hitting or poking by other children



Parents perceived discrimination as human-made **barriers,** and not the child's illness

15% reported difficulty in taking their child to public places

65% of the parents surveyed reported no discriminatory behavior

Felicia McGurren

the disease to her newborn, according to research results from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Baltimore.

Researchers studied 338 HIV-positive pregnant women in Malawi, Africa, 65 percent of whom were vitamin-A deficient. Mothers and infants were tracked through the child's first year. Thirty-two percent of vitamin-A deficient mothers transmitted HIV to their infants, compared to a 7-percent transmission rate among HIV-infected mothers with sufficient vitamin A.

Ninety-three percent of infants born to mothers with severe vitamin-A deficiency died before age 1, compared to 14 percent of infants born to mothers with adequate vitamin A. Researchers found that vitamin-A deficiency during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy increased HIV-transmission rates, suggesting that early-pregnancy nutritional intervention might reduce vertical transmission rates.

Insulin and IGF-1 hormone

Diabetic adolescents might reduce their insulin requirements by as much as 40 percent with a new peptide hormone, "insulin-like growth factor," or IGF-1, scientists at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) reported.

A combination of IGF-1 and insulin was proven to balance diabetics' blood-sugar levels, and is expected to reduce diabetic adolescents' weight-gain tendencies. Researchers proved that IGF-1 enhances fuel uptake, improves muscle-to-fat ratios, and reduces insulin requirements.

Neural-tube defect cause

Women who give birth to infants with neural-tube defects (NTDs) might have a defect in the enzyme, methionine synthase, researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) reported.

Since high doses of folic acid, taken shortly after conception, have been proven to help prevent NTDs, and since women who had NTD infants also tended to have lower levels of vitamin B12, researchers investigated bodily chemical reactions requiring both components.

The conversion of homocysteine to the amino acid, methionine, by methionine synthase, was the only such reaction. Mothers of NTD infants studied, had higher levels of unconverted homocysteine, proving the enzyme defect.

Women with methionine-synthase defect might require more folic acid than other pregnant women, but additional B12 supplementation might decrease folic acid doses required, researchers concluded.

Breastfeeding ignorance

Physicians are ill-prepared to instruct and counsel breastfeeding mothers,

according to a study reported in the Feb. 8 *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

In a national, random sample of 3,115 residents and 1,920 practicing physicians in pediatrics, family medicine and obstetrics/gynecology, yielding a 68 percent response rate, 90 percent endorsed breastfeeding. Only 50 percent felt confident about counseling. All specialties had poor knowledge of breastfeeding benefits and clinical management. Seventy percent of pediatricians thought they had received "less than adequate" or "no" breastfeeding-support preparation.

Ill-prepared physicians are unlikely to encourage breastfeeding, projecting the attitude that the practice is "too much trouble," researchers speculated. Physicians are unlikely to accurately advise new mothers on breastfeeding problems, contributing to abandoned efforts. Physicians' confidence in their breastfeeding counseling abilities was significantly greater only for those who had breastfed or whose spouse had breastfed.

Prader-Willi syndrome

Prader-Willi syndrome is a rare, incurable birth defect first identified as "floppy baby syndrome," that progresses to a life-long condition marked by insatiable appetite and behavior problems, according to the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association.

Affecting one in 4,000 to one in 7,000 births, cases often go unrecognized until puberty, by which time victims might die from heart, kidney or pulmonary problems brought on by morbid obesity.

Characteristics at birth include hypotonia, developmental delays and failure to thrive. Between ages 2 and 4, eating compulsions lead to obesity from abnormal calorie utilization, and extreme temper tantrums surface. Other symptoms include coordination and speech problems, stunted growth, incomplete sexual development and low IQ.

AAP NEWS
Published Monthly



American Academy of Pediatrics
P.O. Box 927
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927

Medical Editor: Steven P. Shelov, M.D.
Managing Editor: Nancy Peterson
Assistant Editor: Gerry Clark
News Writer: Laurie Larson
Washington Correspondent: Marjorie Tharp
Art Director/Production Coordinator: Felicia McGurren
Advertising/Subscriptions Coordinator: Pamela Malik

PUBLISHER - AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

President: George Comerchi, M.D.

Executive Director: Joe M. Sanders, Jr., M.D.

Associate Executive Director: Roger F. Suchyta, M.D.

Department of Communications Director: Linda Martin

Division of Member Communications Director: Nancy Peterson

AAP News (ISSN-1073-0397) is published monthly by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007. Printed in the U.S.A. Second-class postage rate is paid at Arlington Heights, IL and additional mailing offices.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to AAP News, The American Academy of Pediatrics, Division of Member Communications, P.O. Box 927, Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927.

AAP News © 1995. All rights reserved. Views expressed in AAP News are not necessarily endorsed by the Academy. Publication of an advertisement neither constitutes nor implies a guarantee or endorsement by AAP News or the American Academy of Pediatrics of the product or service advertised or of the claims made for the product or service by the advertiser.

SUBSCRIPTIONS—Members: The subscription price is included in the annual AAP membership dues. Nonmembers: Subscription price is \$30 per year.

For advertising rates and subscriptions, contact: Pamela Malik at (708) 228-5005, ext. 7667

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 48,000 pediatricians dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.