



HEALTH
KwaZulu-Natal

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CEREBRAL PALSY AWARENESS WEEK

24 – 30 August 2006

Cerebral Palsy Awareness Week begins on 24 – 30 August and this year the focus is on children. Children with Cerebral Palsy have different strengths and weaknesses and differ in their abilities and development. Children with Cerebral Palsy have the same rights as other children and must be not subjected to any kind or form of discrimination. Access to health care and other services can enable the child with Cerebral Palsy to achieve their potential and demonstrate their abilities. During the week starting on the 24th of August therapists and other rehabilitation workers will run Cerebral Palsy clinics and Cerebral Palsy management workshops at public hospitals throughout the province to inform and educate other workers and community members at large on management and prevention of Cerebral Palsy.

Stimulation workshops /clinics to be conducted will include activities such as:

- Assessments and /examinations of CP children /children with delayed developmental milestones
- Stimulation activities, toy making
- Measurement for CP chair inserts or buggies
- Demonstration on CP handling skills including: feeding, positioning etc
- Education and counselling of mothers of CP children and caregivers
- Distribution of CP pamphlets and educational material

Other activities will include education and antenatal classes to pregnant mothers as well as who would-be mothers on preventative measures of Cerebral Palsy.

What is Cerebral Palsy?

It is a group of disorders associated with developmental brain injuries that occur during foetal development, birth, or with the first 2 to 3 years of life.

It is characterized by a disruption of motor skills with symptoms such as spasticity, paralysis, mental retardation, seizures, vision or hearing problems.

It is no longer considered as a disease but rather as a chronic non-progressive neurological disorder. The incidence is estimated to be 1.5 to 4 per 1000 births.

Causes

The exact cause of the brain injury is not known; can be due to complications related to prematurity as a result of mother's general health and behavioural factors during pregnancy such as smoking, alcohol intake, exposure to chemical toxins or harmful substances, or a baby can be deprived of blood, oxygen or other nutrients before or during birth. After birth Cerebral Palsy can be due to head injury (trauma) or infectious diseases such meningitis or cerebral malaria. A small percentage could be hereditary or familial. A child who is at highest risk of developing CP is the premature baby.

Children with CP have many problems not all of them related to the brain injury. Most of these complications are nevertheless neurological and include epilepsy, mental retardation, learning disabilities and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorders.

Signs and Symptoms

- Delayed or abnormal movements of body part /s or whole body
- Stiffness or floppiness
- Un-coordinated movements or slight limp
- Birth defects e.g. irregular shaped spine, small head, stiff jaw, drooling, crying, poor sucking or swallowing reflexes etc.

The above signs and symptoms depend on the severity of the brain insult or injury and may be progressive in appearance or may become more pronounced as the child grows older.

Treatment

There is no cure for CP, hence treatment is often needed throughout life to help manage symptoms, prevent complications and maximize abilities. Medication, sometimes surgery, specialized equipment and devices and therapy for stimulation to prevent complications is highly recommended. The mother or caregiver of a CP child must be an integral part of the therapy team which may include: a Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Audiologist, Social worker /Psychologist, Medical Doctor. Children with CP often need different kinds of therapy to help them improve their skills in walking, talking and using their hands. Therapy may be provided at a hospital, CHC, Clinic or through a support group.

Prevention

It is of paramount importance that a pregnant woman attends prenatal and antenatal clinics regularly. Pregnant women must also avoid predisposing factors such as drinking alcohol, smoking, exposure to toxic chemicals (Pollution), and must eat healthy food to prevent prematurity or under-weight babies.

Pregnant mothers must ensure that they give birth under supervision of a doctor or mid-wife nurse. Baby's immunization schedule must be up-to date.

Despite the disability associated with CP, the assistance of the relevant health professionals and a caring and supportive family can create opportunities for happiness and success for the child with CP.

For more information please contact Mr. Leon Mbangwa on 083 459 8695