

For a Better Future

The doctors at the Children's Hospital No, 1 in Chisinau are terrified as they recall a case they had a few weeks ago. The ambulance brought Ruxandra, a 4-year old girl who could hardly breathe to the hospital. She had a suffocating cough, a high fever, and was in a state of near-coma. The doctors acted rapidly to try and save the girl at all costs. In spite of their efforts, the little girl died. Later, Ruxandra's parents explained to the doctors that it all started with an ordinary cold. The parents didn't worry too much that their daughter was coughing, and they ignored the listlessness that lasted for a week. They let her stay at home with her grandmother who fed her milk and tea with lemon. After a week Ruxandra started to feel worse. The parents realized too late that they must call a doctor, but the intervention was in vain.

Unfortunately, cases like this occur frequently. UNICEF statistics reveal that 40% of the children under five die at home. They never make it to the hospital where doctors could save them. In Moldova every fourth child under age one dies due to respiratory infections. Over 90% of the deaths are caused by acute pneumonia. The second cause of death is various intoxications (food products and pills and toxic products which are visible and close at hand for the children) and traumas. Specialists claim that these can be avoided; these occur because parents leave children unattended and they are lacking basic health and safety knowledge. According to an UNICEF study, home-care for sick children is unsatisfactory because parents have a limited knowledge in treating the children, and are not properly trained or instructed.

Another cause that has already become a phenomenon is poverty. Due to a lack of money, parents are unable to call doctors, and when they do, they cannot afford the expensive treatment. There are many families where children are undernourished and are vulnerable to cold and damp homes. As a result, their immune system is weakened and they become less able to fight off diseases. Recent data from the Ministry of Health shows that 47% of the children under the age of one suffers from anemia. The mortality rate of new-born babies is caused by the poor health of the mothers and the low quality of assistance in maternity wards, especially in rural areas. Child mortality has increased, with higher numbers of premature births and retarded development of children. Congenital malformations represent a vital factor due to lack of resources to treat the children. Our medical system lacks modern diagnosis to diagnose the children and the hospitals are unable to perform proper surgery.

Disabled children encounter terrible difficulties. The survival rate is 10 times higher since the Republic of Moldova has is limited in its ability to treat, rehabilitate and integrate disabled children into society. The high number of disabled children and high mortality rates are linked to the lack of sanitary education and family planning. Pregnant women neglect the basic norms of protecting the unborn child and do not give up smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Poor work conditions and inadequate nutrition are treated with indifference by the future mothers and those close to them.

Statistics reflect the circumstances – child mortality rate has increased in recent years, reaching a rate of 23.6 in 1,000 children in the year 2000. In developed countries, child mortality rates averages 7 in 1,000. The Ministry of Health and UNICEF launched a special program intended to improve the health of mothers and children. In April 2003 the National Committee for the Protection of Children's Rights approved the National Strategy for Family and Child Protection. These programs include the promotion of universal salt iodization and

flour fortification with iron in the nutrition of mother and child. The strategy focuses on the access of children to health services, and equipping the hospitals with updated equipment. The strategy targets the legislation and intends to update social and health services. “The main interventions are aimed at improving basic health services for under-5 children: emphasizing prevention, prenatal care and care at birth; immunization; nutrition; and integrating management of childhood illnesses”, UNICEF Representative Giovanna Barberis says. “These are achieved by increasing and improving the access of mothers and children to health services, by training the medical personnel, by providing technical assistance, and by delivering medicines and equipment. UNICEF has recently initiated activities aimed to educate parents. Unfortunately, a great number of death cases of young children could be prevented if the parents were trained to recognize the dangers which threaten their children's health and learn basic care for children”, concludes Giovanna Barberis.

Following the implementation of these programs, the Republic of Moldova registered an important progress: in the year 2002 mortality rate for the under-5s decreased to 14.8 deaths to 1,000 children. International experts believe that the Millennium Development Goals to achieve the target of reducing by 2015 the under-five mortality rates by two thirds represent a real target for the developing countries, including the Republic of Moldova. In the first stage of achieving this goal, Moldova should reduce the mortality to up to 12 deaths in 1,000 children.

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