

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Our children are dying

On March 15 at 04.00 a.m., the ambulance brought in a four-month baby at the Chisinau Children's Municipal Hospital No1. The boy could hardly breathe and was exhausted from crying. The medical examination revealed an acute viral-bacterial infection, toxic form with purulent encephalitis, cerebral oedema, and cerebral coma. His condition was extremely serious and he was admitted to the intensive care unit immediately.

Recently this situation has become quite common in children's hospitals and sadly, most of the time doctors cannot save the children.

Petru P. was born healthy and for the first 4 months of his life everything was normal. This was until he got a respiratory virosis. The child's anamnesis reveals that the disease manifested through coughing, running nose, fever, insomnia, and lack of appetite. 'The more experienced' neighbors diagnosed him with 'an ordinary cold' and advised the young mother to treat him with complementary remedies. For two days the mother applied compresses with honey and crushed cabbage leaves, cough syrup, and nose drops. Believing it is an ordinary cold that can be treated with home remedies; the woman did not seek advice from the family doctor. Two days later, when the boy had convulsions, the parents finally called the ambulance. The doctor's efforts were in vain and little Petru died in the hospital in the course of a few hours. 'I didn't believe it is something serious. I thought it is an ordinary cold that can be easily treated. That is why I didn't take him to the hospital. If I called for the doctor I had to pay and we have no money,' said Maria P. the mother, visibly marked by the tragedy. She has been crying since March and continuously repeats 'Why did you take the light of my eyes?'

The only income for the family was the child allowance and the sporadic salary the husband gets from the building site. That is why it was hard to spend money on medicine. Maria says that for a visit to the doctor they have to pay 10-15 lei plus the laboratory tests.

Nicolae Kiskin, chief doctor at the intensive care unit and deputy-chief at the Chisinau Children's Municipal Hospital No 1, said that if the child would have been admitted to hospital on time he could have been saved. If the hospitalization had been delayed, he would have died at home. 'He was a child with a normal development, with real chances of survival. Young children need to be checked by the doctors as soon as the parents suspect an infection,' claims the doctor.

Based on his 30 years experience, Nicolae Kiskin established the following statistics: out of 6 hospitalized children 5 are brought by the ambulance and only 1 is hospitalized at the recommendation of a doctor – meaning that they are in a serious condition already. Dr Kiskin also claims that parents should not pay anything for the hospitalization and treatment of the children because the hospital is included in a project of the Italian non-governmental organization 'Amici dei Bambini' that provides free medication, laboratory substances, food and hygienically products. In January 2001 'Amici dei Bambini' intervened to avoid shutting down the Chisinau Children's Municipal Hospital No1 by the Moldova authorities due to lack of funds.

A third of the deaths could be avoided

Every day children with congenital malformations occupy two of the four beds in the intensive care unit at the Chisinau Children's Municipal Hospital No1. Most of the time in the hospital forms the 'parents' occupations' are filled in like this: mother - housewife, father - unemployed. Recently, more and more children are brought to hospitals by relatives or neighbors, since their parents work abroad on the black market.

According to the doctors at the Ministry of Health, little Petru's case is common. Forty percent of children who die under the age of 5, die at home, pneumonia being a major cause of death. The clearest sign of danger is frequent inhaling, but surveys reveal that only 25% of the mothers are aware of this. More children would be saved if the parents would know the seven main symptoms and would address the doctor on time. By applying training policies and programs for the community and family the infantile mortality rate would be reduced. Although the social-economic situation is dramatic in Moldova, in the past year the infant mortality rate decreased. National statistics reveal that infant mortality was 14.7 deaths to 1,000 live babies last year compared to the rate registered in 2001, of 16.4 deaths to 1,000 live babies. A third of the deaths could be avoided. Moldova has one of the highest mortality rates of children under 5 caused by trauma, accidents and poisoning. The structure for infant mortality appears like this: malformations, premature birth consequences, respiratory diseases (18.9 of deaths), intoxications, accidents and poisoning (10.2%) and infectious diseases (5.1%).

The National Nutrition survey reveals that anaemia represents 47% at children ages 6-12 and 28% of children under 5. Twenty percent of fertile women suffer from anaemia. In April 2003 the National Committee for the Protection of Children Rights approved the National Strategy for Family and Child Protection. 'The strategy is very important because the situation is dramatic; over 70% of the children in Moldova grow and develop in poor families, and 45% at an early age do not attend kindergarten and the infant mortality rate is high,' says the president of the committee.

Moldova expects to accomplish the reduction of the mortality rate of under 5 children up to 12 deaths to 1,000 live babies. Moldova committed to this objective along with the other states that signed the Millennium Declaration. The National Health Policy establishes the target for the rate of the infant mortality rate to 10 deaths to 1,000 live babies. These programs include the promotion of breast-feeding and universal salt iodization. 1,200,000 persons were vaccinated against rubella and measles in the national campaign from November 2002 to May 2003.

In order to diminish the under 5 children death rate UNICEF experts recommend increased access to health services by providing accessible services to children between 0-5 years, including vital medicine in treating diseases as well as promoting a healthy nutrition.

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