

When the child is sick

Sickness in a child can result from dehydration. This is caused by loss of body fluids which is made up of water and salts. When sick children have diarrhoea or are vomiting, they can lose large amounts of salts and water from their bodies and can become dehydrated very quickly. Dehydration can be very dangerous, especially for babies and toddlers. Children can even die if they are not treated.

The need to spread awareness amongst parents is felt much more today as the country has witnessed lakhs of children fall ill each season. Diarrhoea has killed more children than malaria. So far the advocacy programmes have been few and far between and have drawn little attention. Diarrhoea, which is caused by rotavirus, infects the cells in the intestines. The rotavirus vaccine is now in place and in the near future it will be administered along with those for polio, measles and other diseases.

When Rotary's PolioPlus programme combined with the local Government's immunisation drive did not eradicate the virus from every corner, it was noticed that children who suffered from diarrhoea were prone to attacks from polio virus as the oral polio vaccine could not be retained by them in the body.

It was reported that 2.16 million children die every year due to diarrhoea and 15 countries including India, account for majority of these deaths. The reason? Diarrhoea has been ignored for decades and did not receive a substantial financial support from governments. Unlike AIDS, malaria and TB, no specific funds were dedicated to the control of diarrhoea. In addition, deplorable sanitation conditions and poor quality of drinking water added to the crisis in countries such as India.

But there is new hope now. The administration of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and zinc tablets have proved that diarrhoea can be controlled and children saved. The quiet revolution over the past few years has been made possible due to the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, US Agency for International Development and governments. Though the effective use of zinc in this therapy was first invented in the 90's it is only recently that

the concept has gained momentum. When the researchers from the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, Baltimore, gave the dose of syrup containing 20 mg of zinc to children, the rate of diarrhoea dropped dramatically. The experiment was also tried in New Delhi with satisfying results.

The NIDs are just a few weeks away. But before that every Rotary club must conduct health camps and spread the awareness about controlling diarrhoea. The zinc tablets are available with the Governmental agencies and adequate stocks of these must be there at the local health posts before the NIDs. All the Rotary Districts in India must complete atleast four health camps in the urban and rural areas before the first NID. Parents must be informed not to neglect symptoms of diarrhoea in their children. The urgent need to improve sanitation and supply of clean drinking water

must become the focus of clubs.

Rotary's campaign against diarrhoeal deaths commenced all over India with the Zinc and ORS camps starting at the Sundar Lal Jain Hospital in New Delhi. Shrimathi Rajashree Birla gave the programme a boost by inaugurating the camp. The leaders



Shrimathi Rajashree Birla inaugurates the Zinc ORS Programme.

of Rotary, PRIP Rajendra K Saboo, DG of District 3010 Ashish Gosh, DGE Amit Jain, INPPC Chairman Deepak Kapur and members of RC Delhi Safdarjung were present at the impressive function.

Fund raising for this programme is the duty of every club. Earlier, celebrities did not hold concerts for diarrhoea unlike what they did for AIDS or cancer. This campaign now needs the support of every Rotarian.

Rotarians have given a new lease of life to children. By controlling diarrhoea, we can hope to get rid off polio and end this global tragedy. We can save millions of children. Every club member should take up this challenge. I hope they do.



*Rtn. Ashok Mahajan
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