

Early Childhood Development and Disability

EAP's reaction on the Early Childhood Development and Disability

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Comment European Academy of Paediatrics – Draft

The European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) exists to promote the health of children and young people in Europe. The EAP unites paediatricians taking care of children, healthy and ill, this includes: Paediatricians supervising newborns, infants, children and adolescents in outpatient or ambulatory settings such as public health clinics, health centers and solo or group practices, under the National Health Service system or privately. Taking care of all aspects of prevention, diagnosis, management and rehabilitation, extending to the somatic, psychoaffective and social sphere, as well as health promotion and advocacy. The management of patients with paediatric problems or conditions that require a hospital setting for their diagnosis and / or treatment. The management of patients with complex and chronic disorders by highly specialised diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, requiring profound knowledge and special skills, and including relevant clinical research.

The EAP acknowledges the Convention on Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations, that all children have a right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. Therefore, the EAP endorses the principles of chronic care management for children and will support their harmonization and implementation.

The EAP recognizes the need of appropriate early identification, diagnostic confirmation, and longitudinal management providing the gateway to the prevention of illness and optimal overall health for children with chronic and disabling conditions. The chronic care model will reduce fragmented care and enhance disease management including participation and support of families in the care process. Therefore, promotion of the chronic care model should be adopted as a framework for improved systems of health care for children with rare and chronic and disabling conditions in Europe and beyond (EAP Statement December 2011).

Sustainable Strategies

The EAP wants to contribute to sustainable strategies to build on multisectoral approaches to guarantee the rights of (young) children with disabilities and their families. By:

- Identifying children with disabilities through child health surveillance and vaccination programs
- Providing children with an accurate diagnosis
- Developing management programs to prevent disabilities and to achieve the maximal potential of the child in its life.

Children with disabilities

Children may be born with preventable congenital anomaly caused by teratogenic effects of medicine, alcohol or infectious diseases. Other congenital anomalies may be part of complex genetic disorders. Often the spectrum of these disorders is broad. Early recognition is dependent on revealing symptoms and on accessibility of diagnostic tests. In itself most disabling conditions manifesting in early childhood are rare, still about 3-5% of all children will have a chronic disabling condition. Proper etiological diagnosis is needed for care and support and also to prevent stigmatization and isolation of families because of inaccurate assumption of etiologies such as blaming parents' (more often mothers') behavior.

Children with disabilities are best cared for within their own family environment. They should be protected from discrimination and be provided with access to a range of services and supports which are specially designed to achieve their full potential in life and optimal participation in society. The medical home (or chronic care) concept is designed for a collaborative management approach at the primary health care level involving patients, their families and other health care providers to reduce the burden of disease for the child, its family, and the society.

Access to programs and services

Over 85% of all children in Europe are vaccinated monitored by WHO (Vaccine Preventable Diseases Monitoring System). Vaccination and public preventive child health programs may be provided with tools to identify children at risk - or with features of a disabling conditions and vice versa, these programs can include essential vaccinations, basic treatment for common illnesses, as well as the guidance to proper education and rehabilitation. European societies and health systems are diverse. The EAP can, through its network, develop and provide standards for primary preventive care for all children in Europe, including those with special needs. EAP recognizes that this can only be done in a multisectoral approach with other professionals and not in the last with patient organizations.

Identifying and registering children with disabilities

It is stated that identification of children with disabilities is needed to support them during humanitarian situations. Equally the identification and registration can help in monitoring causes of child death under 5 years as well as estimating age-standardised disability-adjusted life year (DALY) rates from congenital anomalies by country and vaccination covered of children with disabilities. The WHO millennium goal (4) in the area of newborn and child health is to contribute to efforts to reduce the under five mortality rate. It does so by addressing, through research and the development and introduction of tools, the major causes of child morbidity and mortality, and the promotion of optimal child health and development. Working in the diversity of health system, country sizes and populations as well as economies European paediatricians may contribute to policies on how to achieve these public goals worldwide.

Conclusion and recommendation

The effort by UNICEF and WHO to stimulate discussion, planning and action on issues related to disability, early childhood development and early childhood intervention is a step forward to overcome inequities. The issues as stated in the consultation document are recognized by the EAP. The EAP has initiated politics and activities with similar goals. In most actions listed as implications for policy and programming EAP can be a supportive partner to promote changes necessary to ensure that children with disabilities are guaranteed the same rights as all other persons.

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