

Strengthening Quality in Primary Health Care Delivery - Reducing Mortality Rate of Infants and Children with Heart Disease.

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Abstract

Congenital heart disease is the most common cause of heart disease in infants and children; it represents over ninety percent of all heart diseases in the pediatric age group. It is the most serious birth defect with incidence of 0.8 to 1 percent of all live births. In countries with limited resources, large numbers of infants and children with correctable lesions do not survive and many who survive have severe limitations. The development of medical and surgical technology has led to early diagnosis and treatment which can improve the survival rate in this group.

Health care reform in Thailand, led to the adoption of universal health care coverage in 2002. This has resulted in development of ways and means to increase equity in health care delivery. In regards to congenital heart disease, training programs for primary health care personnel were instituted for early recognition of heart diseases in infants and children during school health examinations and routine immunization visits. This training program was started in Sukhothai province in 2005; 51,201 primary school children were screened, 66 were found to have heart diseases, a prevalence of 1.19 per 1000. Of these children, 61 had congenital heart disease (1.1:1000). Twenty two children (34%) were new cases, of these, 59 percent were sent for surgery. Thirty nine patients (64%) were known cases but had previously been lost to follow up because of socioeconomic issues and too many appointments. Of these, 65% required surgery. Similar programs have been implemented in many provinces and will be instituted throughout the whole country.

In 1993, with the cooperation of public and private clinics and hospitals, mobile and extended pediatric cardiac clinics were initiated in rural and urban areas. To date these mobile units have made over 80 trips throughout the country, and examined over 5000 children. Among these infants and children over 80 percents were found to have heart disease, sixty percent were known cases, that had been previously lost to follow up. Among these cases 60% needed surgery or intervention.

Due to the limited number of well trained pediatric cardiac surgeons, there is a long surgical waiting list. To address this problem a programme of weekend and evening cardiac surgery was started in the year 2002. Only simple cases were scheduled for this program. Up to date, over 6000 operations have been performed, with a mortality rate of less than 2 percent. These operations represent over 40 percent of all cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease done during the period. 17 public and 4 private hospitals are involved with this program.

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