

3rd INTERNATIONAL FORUM

“Reducing Child Mortality – the Russian experience of universal pediatric care coverage for child population as an instrument for achieving Millennium Development Goals”

An international forum on reducing child mortality hosted by the Scientific Center of Children's Health in Moscow has come to a close.

The background is as follows. Several years ago, an initiative on maternal and children mortality reduction in the developing countries was approved at the summit of leaders of the major countries in Canada; this initiative is known as the Muskoka Initiative aimed at significant contribution to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. Committed to the undertaken obligations, Russia is actively realizing this initiative. One of the methods of Muskoka Initiative realization is holding forums involving representatives of the developing economies of the Central and South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America. The keynote of the first forum was improvement of obstetric aid and neonatal care. The second forum focused on pediatric infections. This third forum's name was as follows: “Reducing Child Mortality – the Russian experience of universal pediatric care coverage for child population as an instrument for achieving Millennium Development Goals”. Public health officers, scientists, doctors from more than 20 countries, representatives of international organizations and public associations took part in the Forum.

If the world completes the Millennium Development Goals, we will have saved 30 mn children 2 mn mothers.

Russian experience

Russian genius of a writer, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, once wrote that it is the posterity that make men immortal. By establishing conditions for the younger generation's health preservation and enhancement, we provide our countries and the humankind in whole with future well-being. That is why child mortality reduction is one of the top priorities both of Russia and the United Nations.

The children are not at fault for having been born in one or another place on the Earth. All of them want to be healthy and happy. The highly professional congress was dedicated to the means of making children so, of saving children's lives.

The First Deputy Federal Council Chairman Alexander Torshin, welcoming speech for the Forum participants: “Our country has consistently and vigorously supported all the international initiatives aimed at improving pediatric healthcare and accessible medicine. Russian specialists continuously analyze experience of their foreign colleagues and are always ready to share their knowledge, render consultative and practical assistance for the purpose of saving lives of the children. We are proud to have ample experience, as the Russian pediatrics extends back over 250 years and has been pride of the Russian medicine.”

Minister of Health of the Russian Federation Veronika Skvortsova: “We take the work on improving proficiency of doctors from developing economies of the South-East and Central Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe as a great privilege. We are meeting today for the III international forum hosted by the Russian Federation. One of the undoubted achievements of Russia is the 100% pediatric care coverage for child population. We hope that our experience will come in useful to our foreign colleagues.

The Minister emphasized that the Russian Federation has already achieved the Millennium Goal of reducing maternal mortality (from 47.5 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 11.5 in 2012). The rate is below 10 in 43 regions out of 83; zero maternal mortality is registered in 21 regions.

Infant mortality has been reduced threefold within the last 30 years.

“The shift to the new methods of registering live births in accordance with the WHO recommendations (from 500 g) was an important milestone. This resulted in infant mortality rate increase by 16% (up to 8.6 per 1,000 neonates) in 2012. However, this rate reduced down to 8.2

in 2013. This tendency maintained in January-February 2014; the mortality rate was 7.9 in those months. Such a progressive advance gives us hopes for the further improvement.

Achievement of high results would have been impossible without focused governmental and public attention to the issues of children's health and implementation of a wide range of projects and programs.

The government has approved an action plan for improving medical care rendering to women in children for the period from 2014 to 2020. A large set of measures is already included in the State Healthcare Development Program. The National Strategy of Pro-Children Actions for 2012-2017 has been being realized for almost two years already; it has become the basis for developing a coordinated social policy aimed at supporting children and families in all regions.

The framework law "On the fundamental health protection principles in the Russian Federation" contains a special chapter dedicated to maternity and childhood."

V. Skvortsova emphasized that the achieved progress is a result of a complex state policy regarding health protection, completion of priority national project "Health" resulting in introduction of maternal certificates and the healthcare modernization program contributing to improvement of care rendering infrastructure for mothers and children.

Project participating countries' representatives

Doctor Abraham Endeshaw Mengistu (Ethiopia), Ministry of Health officer:

"The initiatives undertaken by the Government of the Russian Federation indicate its high concern with improving children's health. We have been deeply impressed with what we have seen."

In her report, director of the Department of Children Medical Care Development and Maternity Obstetric Service of the Ministry of Health of Russia Elena Baybarina concentrated on the means of reducing infant and under-5 mortality. The Government has launched large-scale expensive projects aimed at improving healthcare, including pediatric healthcare, in recent years. 23 modern perinatal centers and 11 high-technology centers for complex cardiac and neurosurgery have been built. Neonatal screening survey regarding hereditary diseases and hearing disorders has been expanded. A lot has been done to improve the material and technical basis. 1,143 obstetric and pediatric establishments were repaired. Almost 2,000 neonatal resuscitation beds, 2,000 neonatal pathology beds and almost 2,000 rehabilitation beds were set. A three-tier system of medical care rendering to mothers and children was organized.

Program "Maternal certificate" was extremely expensive; almost 24,000 units of expensive modern equipment (infant care incubators, artificial pulmonary ventilation apparatuses, fetal monitors etc.) were purchased and medical workers' salaries were increased as a result thereof. The number of women registering at early pregnancy has increased as well.

In order not to put children at a disadvantage, maternity and childhood funding was realized as a separate entry. Thus, according to the plan, at least 25% of the funds were to be allocated for health protection of mothers and children; in practice, almost 29% of the funds were allocated therefor.

E. Baybarina: "Our primary goal was 100% medical care coverage for child population, including unborn children.

A new antenatal testing algorithm was introduced; almost 77% of the registered pregnant women underwent such testing in 2013."

Neonatal surgery development allows correcting a considerable amount of the congenital disorders detected in unborn children in the neonatal period. Almost all children are covered by neonatal and audiological screening. According to E. Baybarina, more than 1,000 cases of hereditary diseases has been revealed; thus, adequate treatment has been launched in time and, therefore, more than 1,000 early deaths and severe disability forms have been prevented.

The National Immunization Calendar is expanding. From this year on, it includes pneumococcal vaccination.

A new preventive medical examination procedure for children of 0-18 years of age has been established.

E. Baybarina: “It is important to detect the pathology in its early stage, as it is necessary to launch the process of recovery, rehabilitation or treatment thereafter.”

An increasing number of children have been gaining access to high-technology care provided by the leading national clinics regardless of their place of residence.

Kamchybek Uzakbaev (Kyrgyzstan), director of the National Center of Maternity and Childhood Protection:

“We have gained an enormous bundle of knowledge. We will implement experience of the Russian Federation regarding infant and under-5 mortality reduction and medical care rendering quality improvement as soon as we return to Kyrgyzstan. For us, Moscow and Saint Petersburg have always been at the cutting edge of pediatrics. Many of us have studied or undertaken internship there. We would like to meet our colleagues more often. Kyrgyzstan is a country with heavy morbidity burden; this hampers achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Upon an initiative of the Ministry of Health and the WHO, we have been realizing the pediatric care quality improvement program financed by the Russian Federation at pilot hospitals; pediatric medical care standards based on the international guidelines are being introduced at 11 inpatient hospitals in the framework thereof; key monitoring indicators have been determined. Such forums contribute to the development of pediatric services.”

27 seminars for 270 doctors from 12 countries (neonatologists, obstetricians-gynecologists, intensivists, pediatric neurologists, cardiologists and other professionals) were conducted in 2012-2013 in the framework of the Muskoka Initiative. As long as practical skill training is an important part of personnel training, 8 simulation training centers equipped with modern models, man simulators and software and staffed by the best specialists were organized.

Another such center opened during the Forum at the Scientific Center of Children’s Health, which, according to the Minister, is the primary coordinator of the children’s pediatric service of Russia. The specialists working at that leading establishment have visited countries of Africa and Asia and familiarized themselves with the work of obstetric, pediatric and sanitary epidemiological services. The information they obtained from communication with their colleagues from the visited countries allows, according to the Minister, correctly adjusting the educational programs.

V. Skvortsova: “The new simulation center is distinguished by better capabilities for pediatric surgery and resuscitation skill training. It contributes to developing doctors’ skills, so that they are capable of performing the most complex operative interventions. It is distinguished by the unique computer technologies. For instance, Professor Heinrichs from Germany was impressed and even dumbfounded with what he had seen.”

Even more dumbfounded were doctors from the less developed countries.

According to director of the Scientific Center of Children’s Health Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alexander Baranov, 9 scientific-practical educational seminars making use of the simulation center will be organized for foreign colleagues at the Scientific Center of Children’s Health in 2014-2015.

Doctor Haruna Baba Jibril (Botswana), director of the public health department of the Ministry of Health:

“This is the first visit to Russia for us. The Scientific Center of Children’s Health is amazing. The Forum has shaped a model to strive for. We hope that our cooperation will have a regular basis. It would be great if we could send our specialists to study at this fine establishment every year. It would have considerably improved quality of the care rendered to our children.”

Speeches of representatives of almost all the participating countries started with the words “I would like to express gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation and the Forum

hosts...” They spoke of the recent changes in their countries. Thus, 11 Angolan hospitals have been assessed with financial help of the Russian Federation in order to determine why children die (Angola features high under-5 mortality) and mortality reduction measures have been developed.

Head of the pediatric health department of the Ministry of Health of Armenia Nune Pashayan explained how Russian experience of introducing child’s health certificates (extension of the maternal certificate program) helped to almost double financial backing of hospital pediatric care. The main parameters have drastically improved within one year since introduction of child’s certificates. Hospital mortality has started to decline; 24-hour in-hospital mortality rate has decreased fivefold. Postneonatal and under-5 mortality rates have decreased.

N. Pashayan: “These occasional meetings at forums along with improvement of knowledge and skills of our doctors at the 2-week-long training courses in Russia have significantly contributed to the infant mortality reduction in Armenia”.

B. Daelmans, WHO representative: “The Forum is a wonderful ground for a serious conversation about the quality of healthcare services and what the pediatricians can do to accelerate upon achievement of the Millennium Goals. Progress is obvious even in the countries with high infant mortality. We all play a significant role in this process. We must eradicate unequal access to medical care.”

According to B. Daelmans, even limited resources may yield considerable results. The study conducted by the World Health Organization in 2013 indicates that a multitude of deaths could have been prevented by allocating 5 more dollars per person. This additional expenditure would have yielded a nine-fold economic benefit.

Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences A. Baranov, who has thoroughly inquired into the issue, gave the following farewell speech to the foreign colleagues: “Infant and under-5 mortality differ by regions. There are regions with high, medium and low infant mortality rates in every country. The mortality reduction programs (human resources, pharmacological and material and technical support) should be differentiated on the basis of mortality causes and parameters.”

Doctor O. Radnaa (Mongolia), director of the National Hospital:

“Russia is doing a lot for children all over the world. We have received lots of information on the modern pediatric technologies. We are deeply impressed with the Russian achievements. We were completely dumbfounded with what we have seen at the simulation center. I would like to express gratitude for training our specialists in the framework of the Muskoka Initiative. Many Mongolian doctors have completed training there.

I am sure that we will be able to transfer Russian experience to the Mongolian pediatric system. We would like to establish our own simulation training center and I hope that you will support us in this regard.”

The child must be the center of the Universe

President of the European Pediatric Association Leyla Namazova-Baranova reminded all the participants of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 25th anniversary since the adoption of which will soon be celebrated: “Pediatricians are recognized protectors of the childhood. Every one of us shall do as much as possible to protect these rights.”

E.g., Article 6 of the Convention states that the survival and development of all the children must be ensured to the maximum extent possible. Unfortunately, this article is not always observed. E.g., the WHO-recommended immunization calendar is not implemented in all the countries; thus, neonates die of the vaccination-preventable diseases.

L. Namazova-Baranova: “The National Immunization Calendar of the United States of America (unlike the National Immunization Calendar of the Russian Federation) devotes much attention

to vaccination of pregnant women and protection of the unborn children against the infections that are life-threatening in the first postnatal months, although the vaccination series of these children will be undergoing later. Neonates often die of influenza and pertussis. By vaccinating pregnant women we protect their children even before they start undergoing their own vaccination series. However, our obstetricians-gynecologists often say that pregnant women must on no account be vaccinated.

Or, for instance, the mother had refused to vaccinate the child, thus violating the child's right, and the baby fell ill and died. Article 18 of the Convention states parental responsibility. Unfortunately, there is no legal instrument to punish the parents that are guilty of not having vaccinated their child."

Professor J. Erich from Germany pursued the same point: "The child must be in the center of the Universe. The Convention on the Rights of the Child must be the basis for all of us. If we make it our primary concern, we may achieve great results."

Sherally Rakhmatulloev (Tajikistan), head of the department of medical care organization for mothers and children and family planning of the Ministry of Health and Social Security:

"I would like to rephrase Academician Alexander Baranov and say "If we save children's health, we will save the world." The children determine the future of the nation and constitute natural wealth of any country. This is the third time I am taking part in the Forum and I am accumulating more and more experience with each passing year. 98 pediatric doctors (infectious diseases specialists, resuscitation specialists and neonatologists) from Tajikistan have completed a 2-week-long postgraduate course at the Scientific Center of obstetrics, gynecology and perinatology and at the research institute of pediatric infections in the framework of the Muskoka Initiative. This contributed to improvement of the human resources of our republic. I would like to propose inviting nurses along with doctors to simulation centers for 2-week-long trainings."

Different healthcare systems were represented at the Forum. As far as the Forum was attended not only by the doctors from the project participating countries (12 countries), but also special guests from the highly developed world powers, everyone could familiarize themselves with Japanese (doctor R. Mori), Spanish (rapporteur M. Moya) and German (Professor J. Erich) experience. Doctor N. Rakhmanina described the US pediatric care rendering system. According to her, infant mortality in the United States of America is high and nothing to be proud of. It is in most cases associated with abnormal pregnancy. Many women, especially from the poor strata, are not observed at a hospital in the course of pregnancy, which is a big problem. However, if a woman is under hospital care, her prenatal support is good. Thus, the system is rather contradictory, although rather efficient, especially if a woman does not come from a poor stratum and has an insurance policy.

Meetings of specialists at the Forum allow sharing experience, comparing, drawing conclusions and finding solutions. One of the relevant issues for Russia is the low amount of paramedical personnel. In several US states there are laws forbidding bed operation if the amount of nurses is insufficient; e.g., if there are less than two nurses per one resuscitation bed, this bed must not be operated.

L. Namazova-Baranova: "Russia has found the money for modernization. The new equipment has been installed at numerous establishments. Now we have an opportunity to redefine training of pediatric professionals, to change something. But some of the issues persist, nursing personnel's prestige increase, in particular. That is why we need such forums. We, the pediatricians, should offer our politicians new solutions based on the international experience."

Doctor Francisco Martinez Guillen (Nicaragua), Professor:

"The Forum offers an opportunity to become familiar with the efficient models of care and nursing; to understand how to adapt them in our country; to implement the most efficient and economically reasonable measures contributing to the increasing reduction of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality."

Learning from each other

Such forums are a step towards the further development of healthcare, particularly, of pediatrics; they contribute to the implementation of medical achievements to practice. Head of the Federal Agency of Scientific Organizations of Russia Michael Kotyukov emphasized that Russia has achieved steady reduction of infant and under-5 mortality to a considerably extent because of the activity of the research institutes developing modern efficient technologies of diagnosing and treating various, including socially significant, diseases in children. The Scientific Center of Children's Health conducting fundamental research in the framework of the priority spheres of medical science is an outstanding example. The Center's scientific achievements have been honored with the Science and Technology Prize of the Government of the Russian Federation twice within the recent years.

In her speech dedicated to the state support of scientific research in Russia, deputy Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation Lyudmila Ogorodova emphasized that infant mortality reduction is a driver for development of new technologies.

There is no doubt that technologies are important are necessary. However, according to the metaphoric expression of the US doctor (ex-Russian) Natalya Rakhmanina, however good the carriage is, it will not move unless it is six-horsed, but remain at a museum. In other words, cadres are all-important. That is why so much attention is drawn to their training.

Sergey Khachatryan (Armenia), deputy Minister of Health:

“Forums considerably influence our further actions. This is our third meeting in the framework of the Muskoka Initiative, and every time our specialists return to Armenia with new ideas and solutions. It was important for us to listen to the reports on scientific novelties and substantiation thereof, but it was even more important to understand how to implement these new methods into practice, how to realize them. Sometimes particularities are of very high significance. In my opinion, it would be useful to carry the Forum on in the virtual space – to create a portal for project participants to continually share information, debate and discuss it.”

Valentina EVLANOVA.