INFECTIOUS DIARRHOEA IN THE YOUNG

Strategies for Control in Humans and Animals

Editor: S. TZIPORI

INFECTIOUS DIARRHOEA IN THE YOUNG

Strategies for Control in Humans and Animals

Proceedings of an International Seminar on Diarrhoeal Disease in South East Asia and the Western Pacific Region, Geelong, Australia, 10-15 February 1985

Editor:

Saul Tzipori

Attwood Institute for Veterinary Research Melbourne, Australia

Editorial Committee:

Graeme Barnes, Ruth Bishop Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

and

Ian Holmes, Roy Robins-Browne
Department of Microbiology, University of Melbourne,
Melbourne, Australia



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PREFACE

The seminar on diarrhoeal disease held in February 1985 in Australia, was part of a series of Research for Development Seminars established and sponsored largely by The Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB) with a view to providing a scientific forum to focus on problems in South East Asia and the Western Pacific (SEA & WP) region.

The seminar on infectious diarrhoea in children and neonates of domestic animals was a unique venture; it encompassed all aspects of microbiology including viruses, bacteria and protozoa; gut immunity and immunization; epidemiology and diagnosis; treatment and control. In addition, the seminar brought together research scientists and clinicians from developing and developed countries. The meeting attracted approximately 180 scientists including over 40 from the SEA & WP region, and 30 from other overseas countries.

The meeting was also designed to bring together medical and veterinary scientists concerned with enteric infections, as in the area of gastroenterology, probably more than in any other scientific field, a considerable portion of the available knowledge is complementary, and is a consequence of collaborative and comparative studies between the medical and the veterinary fields.

It was appropriate that the seminar be held in Australia, where the importance of livestock production is vital, and where major advances in understanding the causes of acute diarrhoea in humans and domestic animals have been made in recent years. Together with expert colleagues specially invited from other countries, the Committee hoped to share some of this knowledge with medical and veterinary scientists from the SEA & WP region.

This meeting was timely, since recent advances in technology have indicated that vaccination against some enteric infections may soon be possible. The seminar was, in a way, a tribute to Dr Ruth Bishop and Dr Ian Holmes who by demonstrating the probable significance of rotavirus as a cause of acute diarrhoea in children back in 1974, not only unearthed an important pathogen, but also marked the beginning of an exciting decade of vigorous and sustained global research on infections of the gastrointestinal tract. These activities led to the identification of a considerable number of enteric pathogens previously unrecognized or ill-defined. These developments coupled with newly acquired molecular biological tools, provided an unprecedented opportunity for development of sensitive and rapid diagnostic tests, better definition of mode of action of virulence attributes, and opened new horizons for development of control measures.

In formulating the scientific program for the seminar, the Committee defined 3 major areas it wished the participants to address: the relative significance of various causes of diarrhoea in countries of the region; attributes of enteric pathogens that are relevant to the theme of treatment and control; and present-day and future options available for treatment and control of diarrhoeal disease.

This volume is a documentation of contributions made by scientists at the seminar, they are organized into 14 sections largely according to the format and order in which they were presented.

The Seminar to a large extent fulfilled its major objectives. However, in my view, the one that stood out most clearly was the excellent dialogue which developed among scientsts sharing a common interest, quite independent of origin, social background, or profession.

SAUL TZIPORI

MARCH 1985

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OPENING SESSION

GLOBAL PROBLEMS OF ACUTE DIARRHEA IN YOUNG CHILDREN

ROBERT E. BLACK, M.D., M.P.H.

Center for Vaccine Development, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland

Acute diarrhea remains one of the most important health problems in developing countries. This illness, commonly defined by an increase in the frequency and fluidity of bowel movements relative to the usual pattern of each individual, has been found to be a major contributor to illness and death in children of the developing world.

A review by the World Health Organization of 24 community-based surveillance studies carried out in 18 developing countries indicated that the median mortality rates for diarrhea in children under five years of age were highest in the under one and one year age groups, with a rate of 20 deaths per 1000 children per year (1). Furthermore, this review indicated that the diarrheal morbidity rates were also highest in the first two years of life with rates of 2-3 episodes per year per child. Based on this review, it was calculated that children less than five years old in Africa, Asia (excluding China), and Latin America had approximately one billion episodes of diarrhea per year, resulting in 4.6 million deaths.

In the last several years, national diarrheal disease control programs and the World Health Organization have conducted a series of diarrhea morbidity and mortality surveys (2). By the end of 1983, 45 such surveys had been carried out. The surveys of children less than five years old confirmed the high total and "diarrhea-associated" mortality rates and further indicated that in individual countries up to 60% of all deaths were associated with diarrhea. Substantial regional differences were also apparent with the highest total and "diarrhea-associated" mortality rates being in African countries. In these countries an average of 49% of the deaths were associated with diarrhea, compared with 19% in Asian countries.

These surveys also indicated that the diarrheal morbidity rate continues to be substantial. The number of diarrheal episodes per child per year ranged from less than two for East Asian countries to 2.5 for South Asian countries and nearly five for African countries.

Although high mortality rates persist in many areas, it is important to note that substantial reductions in mortality rates have occurred in many countries in the last 20 years. Among the countries in Latin America, the infant mortality rate has fallen from an average of 72 per 1000 live births in