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THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICIAN IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILD CARE

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Pre-school child care is not the job of a single individual, whether a professional technical person or auxiliary. The team who cares for the pre-school child covers different aspects: medical care, nutritional care, mental health and the health education of the parents and those who are taking care of the child. The physician can play his role in pre-school child care in different capacities: as clinician, medical officer in MCH services, community health officer, administrator and supervisor for field workers, trainer, and as research worker in the field of pre-school child health care.

The role of the clinician in pre-school child care

The physician in direct contact with the pre-school child can perform the following functions:

1. Assessment of the health condition of the child through physical examination and anthropometric measurement, as well as the different laboratory techniques.
2. Prescribing the needed curative and preventive measures.
3. Implementing the treatment measures himself if there is no available nurse competent to do the job.
4. Follow up the child to watch his progress.
5. Conduct health education of the mother and the custodial staff for the different aspects of care such as nutritional education of the parents and how they conduct the feeding of such a specific type of child.

The role of the maternal and child health officer:

The maternal and child health centres are in charge of care of the pre-school child in different communities. These centres may not be present in remote or rural areas. Instead there may be MCH services as part of the community health services presented as health centres or health units. Whatever may be the pattern of outlet, the MCH officer is responsible for the following:

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1. Care of the normal child through follow-up and check through periodic height and weight measurement and recording, physical examination and periodic check-up of his growth and development.
2. Within integrated curative and preventive services the physician is in charge of diagnosis and treatment of sick children visiting the centre or the corresponding services.
3. He visits the day care centre in his domain. This is the responsibility of the MCH officer in some communities to assure the continuity of services. He might not be the clinician in charge of the children but he is working in the capacity of a public health officer responsible for the pre-school children in the community.
4. Health education of the mothers visiting the MCH centre is his responsibility. This is to be conducted by the MCH officer himself or through the nursing staff in charge or if equipped with a health educator in the centre he/she is the one most fit to be delegated to do the job.
5. The epidemiological study of the pre-school children of the community is his responsibility, as well as the health administrative activities of the centre he has to manage, otherwise his job is not completely done. But these last two jobs are the least to be practised by the MCH officers because he is not sufficiently trained to conduct them at the undergraduate medical education.

The role of the community health officer in the care of the pre-school child:

The community health officer when in charge of a community health centre will be responsible for pre-school child health care. This care will be by both the direct approach as he conducts the direct medical care as well as by the indirect approach. The latter is carried out through environmental sanitation, nutritional education and epidemiological work as well as through registration of vital events.

The physician as an administrator for pre-school child care:

This function is carried out in two major operating fashions, the recruitment and management of the staff for the programme and the supervision of the active field staff. In this capacity the physician is a leader in the implementation of the programme for pre-school child care.

The training role of the physician:

This aspect of the physician's role in pre-school child health care could be shown at every level of training, whether basic training for the different team members, or post-basic.

1. It is true that pre-school child care does not appear as a separate entity in the basic education of the medical student or any of the team members, yet it is touched upon and discussed as part of paediatrics or paediatric nursing. The physician in this set-up plays his role as educator and trainer.
2. Pre-service training: the purpose of this is to focus the general concepts in the basic education on to the field of pre-school child care, besides orienting the health worker towards the field in which he is going to be involved.
3. In-service training: this field is the domain of activity of the physician in two forms; on-the-spot training and formal in-service training. The former is conducted during the supervision of the field staff.

The physician as a research worker in the field of pre-school child health:

This role is well manifested in the research activities involving the normal pre-school child or the clinical conditions during his sickness. The prevention of these conditions at individual level as well as at community level is another aspect of research in which the physician has to conduct studies. This will stimulate research in the field of planning, administration, operation and evaluation of pre-school child health programmes.