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**STRENGTHENING
THE TEACHING OF
DIARRHOEAL DISEASES
IN MEDICAL SCHOOLS**

PROGRAMME FOR THE CONTROL OF
DIARRHOEAL DISEASES



World Health Organization
Geneva

INTRODUCTION

Doctors are responsible for treating many children with diarrhoea. They are also the leaders and teachers of the medical community, both locally and nationally, and so set the standard for the management of diarrhoeal diseases by other health workers. It is vital, therefore, that doctors support the efforts of national diarrhoeal disease control (CDD) programmes. However, doctors will only give such support if they understand and agree with programme guidelines for the treatment and prevention of diarrhoea, and apply them in their own practices.

Appropriate training of medical students is the first step towards establishing correct case management

practice among doctors. Such training should inform students of the scientific basis of the recommended procedures for treating and preventing diarrhoea, and should enable them to develop the skills required for effective case management. However, many medical schools do not provide this training, especially the development of essential skills.

Consequently, medical graduates are often inadequately prepared to treat children with diarrhoea and may have few opportunities to gain skills in correct case management later. Special courses are sometimes organized for graduate physicians, but this is a costly process.

OBJECTIVES

WHO understands the many problems faced by countries trying to strengthen the teaching of diarrhoeal diseases in medical schools. To help them solve these problems, WHO has targeted three main objectives:

- Improving medical students' theoretical and practical *knowledge* of the management and prevention of diarrhoeal disease.
- Upgrading medical students' *skills* in the management of children with diarrhoea.
- Preparing medical students to support the guidelines of their national CDD programme on the treatment and prevention of diarrhoea.

The following specific goals have been developed to achieve these objectives:

- To establish a diarrhoea training unit (or ORT unit) in the teaching hospital of each medical school. Here, students can receive supervised practice in managing children with diarrhoea as an integral part of their training.
- To ensure that teaching on the prevention and treatment of diarrhoeal diseases accords with CDD guidelines.
- To strengthen the methods for teaching students about diarrhoea case management, with an emphasis on interactive teaching, extensive practice with patients, and the development of essential clinical skills.
- To train paediatric faculty, other faculty and key hospital staff in the CDD-recommended practices for diarrhoea case management, and in the most effective methods for teaching these to students.

PROCESS

Preparatory steps are coordinated by a national Coordinating Committee which includes leading members of the academic medical community who are already committed to supporting the national CDD programme. The Committee also coordinates workshop planning and follow-up.

Initial steps

It is crucial that the objectives described above are supported by appropriate governmental ministries, the national CDD programme, and leaders in the participating medical schools. This last group includes deans, hospital directors and heads of paediatric departments, contacted directly to explain the activity and gain their support.

Arrangements must also be made to ensure an adequate supply of training materials, including the student manual, *Readings on Diarrhoea*, and necessary equipment for the diarrhoea training units. These materials may be supplied by WHO, UNICEF, or other sources.

Workshops

Workshops are a key step in the process. They are attended by two or three paediatric staff members

from each medical school, usually the head of the department and one or two colleagues. (If another department, such as Preventive and Social Medicine, teaches about the management of diarrhoeal diseases, a member of its faculty should also attend.) During the workshop, participants learn about the WHO and national CDD programme approach to case management, practice a variety of interactive teaching methods, assess the current methods of teaching in their schools, and develop a 6- to 12-month workplan for achieving each of the specific goals described above. Workshops usually last six days, accommodate 10-15 people, and are held in well-established diarrhoea training units with cases available for teaching and practice.

Follow-up

After the workshop, follow-up is required to monitor progress in implementing the workplan of each school, to ensure that the necessary teaching materials and equipment are procured, and to identify problems that require assistance. The Coordinating Committee usually oversees the follow-up, and develops additional workshops for any schools requiring them.

TASK FORCE ON STRENGTHENING CDD TEACHING IN MEDICAL SCHOOLS

The Programme has assembled a task force of international experts on medical education and diarrhoeal diseases to advise on this effort, review training materials during their development, and assist in leading workshops. Task force members received training in planning and leading workshops at special courses held in Zambia and the Dominican Republic in 1993.

TRAINING MATERIALS

The following training materials have been developed:

□ **Readings on Diarrhoea** for students

This manual contains key information on the etiology, epidemiology, pathogenesis, management, and prevention of diarrhoea. It is intended for all students when they learn about diarrhoeal diseases. If units in the book are assigned as homework, classroom time normally devoted to lecturing can be used for other teaching that involves students more actively.

□ **Instructor Manual**

This is designed to assist instructors in planning how to teach the topics covered in *Readings on Diarrhoea*. Teaching methods that require active student participation are emphasized, as are methods for ensuring that students gain competence in specific clinical skills.

□ **References on Diarrhoea**

This is a collection of original references on diarrhoeal diseases for students or

teachers who wish to study in greater depth any of the topics presented in *Readings on Diarrhoea*.

□ **Guide to Student Evaluation**

This booklet describes methods for evaluating a student's knowledge and skills. It also contains nearly 100 questions for written or oral examinations, especially designed to assess the student's ability to solve clinical problems rather than simply restate memorized facts.

□ **Workshop Director Guide**

This guide is for directors in the planning and conducting of workshops. It provides a sample agenda and detailed guidelines on how to conduct each activity in the workshop.

□ **Workshop Participant Manual**

This contains background information, instructions and work sheets for workshop participants.

ACTIVITIES IN SPECIFIC COUNTRIES

□ **Indonesia and the Philippines**

Early versions of these training materials were used in workshops in Indonesia (at eight medical schools) and the Philippines (at six medical schools). In both countries, follow-up visits showed that most schools had made substantial progress towards all workshop objectives. After this, additional workshops were organized for the remaining medical schools — 17 in Indonesia and 20 in the Philippines.

□ **Viet Nam**

Two workshops were held in Viet Nam for the country's nine medical schools. *Readings on Diarrhoea* has since been translated into Vietnamese and distributed. Diarrhoea training units are being established in all of the country's medical schools with support from UNICEF. A follow-up external evaluation was held in 1992. This showed that workplans were being implemented and that most schools had made substantial progress toward workshop objectives.

Nigeria

Two workshops were held in 1990 and 1991 for the country's 13 medical schools. Copies of *Readings on Diarrhoea* were provided to the participating schools, and key staff from each school received additional training in diarrhoea case management.

India

An initial workshop for five medical schools was held in 1992.

Egypt

An initial workshop for five medical schools was held in 1993.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The number of countries involved in this effort will increase in 1993 and 1994. Members of the task force will help to plan and lead workshops in all WHO Regions. Follow-up activities for the above countries will be continued.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information about this activity can be obtained by contacting:

**The Director
Division of Diarrhoeal and Acute
Respiratory Disease Control
World Health Organization
1211 Geneva 27
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