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AN INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK AGAINST NOMA

NOMA is a facial gangrene which affects malnourished children in the poorest countries in the world. Untreated, NOMA kills or causes children to be so horribly disfigured that they are permanently outcast from their communities. If detected in the early stages, when the disease affects only the inside of the mouth, not only is it possible to save the child but also to stop the destructive spread of the disease. Most children, estimated at 90%, who do not benefit from timely intervention die.

The WHO has been alerted to a possible increase in the number of NOMA cases in Africa.

We have made a crude global estimate of about half a million cases per year in the age group 2 to 6 years, a figure which was provided to the World Bank for the report on the "Global Burden of Disease".

The portion of this estimate attributed to Africa amounts to several hundred thousand cases.

Late in 1992 WHO set up an international action network in collaboration with various non-governmental organizations already operational on the basis of the following strategy:

1. setting up information and educational programmes directed at mothers to make them aware of the signs of the disease, and training health personnel to detect its onset and provide the emergency care needed;
2. organizing and financing aetiological studies on the occurrence and prevalence of the disease, the results of which would provide the basis for the preventive action to be taken;
3. arranging for health services to treat the patients locally and providing them with the necessary nutritional supplements;
4. referring severe cases requiring complex surgical treatment;
5. assisting in the training of local personnel and the opening of a specialized regional centre for complex care.

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