

Probiotics in Clinical Practice: To Use or Not to Use!

Indian drug market is flooded with probiotics and synbiotics (combination of prebiotics and probiotics). The pharmaceutical companies are aggressively marketing them claiming its efficacy in various clinical conditions especially in treatment of diarrhea. It is important to remember that only few probiotics with specific strains such as *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG, *L.reuteri* and *Sachromyces boulerdii* have sufficient grade A evidence in reducing the duration of viral diarrhea and prevention of antibiotic associated diarrhea considerably(1). Ironically, none of bacterial probiotics available in Indian market mention about strain specificity, thus limiting their usefulness.

IAP National Task Force 2006 revised guidelines also do not recommend use of probiotics in management of acute diarrhea till further evaluation regarding its efficacy is established in our

settings(2). Moreover, use of probiotics in preterm, low birth weight baby and immunocompromised children is fraught with risk of bacteraemia, endocarditis, and fungemia (3). The prescriber must consider their efficacy and safety based on evidence based medicine before recommending them to children.

Arun Shah

Associate Professor,

National Medical College, Birgunj, Nepal.

E-mail: drarunshah@hotmail.com

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Punishment for Refusing OPV

Can the parents or caretakers of the children upto 5 years of age be penalised by the local authority or prosecuted in the court of law if they refuse administration of OPV during Pulse Polio Immunization campaign? The Hindustan Times dated 14th August 2007 had published a news item: "Refuse polio drops, lose power and ration cards". It was reported from Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh and stated: "In what appears to a first in Uttar Pradesh the polio drive is sending a clear message to the people: refusing polio drops will cost them dear." On the orders of the Sub-divisional magistrate punishment was meted out to two families whose ration cards were cancelled and power supply disconnected for refusing OPV for the children in their families.

Can such punitive action be taken against a doctor who does not administer OPV to those children who have received IPV to avoid any risk of VAPP in close immunocompromised contacts?

Yash Paul

A-D-7, Devi Marg, Bani Park,

Jaipur 302 016, India.

E-mail: dryashpaul2003@yahoo.com

Reply

Dr Yash Paul has raised very important issues related with human rights. As to the first part of his query, we understand that Pulse Polio Immunization campaign is a part of national effort to eradicate crippling polio disease. All national health programs needs to have persuasive tone and should never have coercive tenure. Coercion may arrogate with fundamental right enshrined in Article 21 of Constitution of India.