

Nurture the Future

DIGANT SHASTRI

National President, Indian Academy of Pediatrics, 2019. drdigantshastri@gmail.com

Though I cannot say whether pediatricians are as much endowed to earn as their many counterparts are, but without any doubt I can vouch, and I am sure you all will agree that we are in an enviable position to nurture the future of the family, the society and the nation, like no other speciality of medical science. Pediatricians have opportunity to study acquisition of language, movement and cognition [1]. We play a vital role in guiding the families in shaping-up the development of child in general, and early brain development in specific. In this way, pediatricians have a role that extends beyond the boundaries of any medical professional [1].

We get the opportunity to nurture the child right from birth till 18 years, the most crucial and formative part of one's life. We have the responsibility to influence various facets of child's life. Ironically, medicines form a very meager part of it. Largely, it is the counseling of the parents, the right kind of advice about feeding, and dealing with difficult behavioral patterns of the child. My dear friends, we are truly blessed to be the torchbearer of this noble endeavour, serving this great organization, the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP). Our academic body nurtures its members by various education and training programs committed to one single goal – to make the life of a baby better.

As a pediatrician, our role is not just limited to diagnose the illness or prescribe the medicines, but we encash the opportunity to carry out developmental assessment, screening and surveillance, and provide anticipatory guidance based on our observations. This creates therapeutic alliances with families [1]. Unfortunately, due to lack of time and commitment, these aspects are often overlooked and the opportunities are missed. Pediatricians play a pivotal role in early identification of developmental problems in children with high risk of developmental disorders, extending positive parenting support, and helping the families with their child to achieve optimum development. Unfortunately many children are being left behind, thus making a large pool of unutilized human resources for the family, society and the

nation. Though we are rapidly moving towards sub-specialization in Pediatrics, the role of Family pediatrician will continue to be a vital cog in the wheel of a child's overall health.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

Every baby born is not only precious to that family but also to the country. If his/her physical or mental health is compromised for any reason, not only the family but the nation also loses its resource. Thus, we need to nurture every human life. No baby should be born without the presence of skilled birth attendant. We are well aware that one golden minute of nurture has bearing on the future of the baby. If we fail to provide this basic necessity to every newborn, we will not qualify to be a developed nation. If we aspire to be a global super power, we have to ensure a head start to every new born – meaning thereby he or she cries within first minute of the birth, receives breastfeeding within first hour of the birth, is protected from all vaccine-preventable diseases, exclusively breastfed for the first six months, and receives timely and adequate complementary feeding. As a pediatrician, our task is cut out. We know that despite covering a huge ground, an enormous gap still persists, and that's how each and every pediatrician can contribute to nurturing the future of our country.

WHO CONTROLS THE PRESENT, CONTROLS THE FUTURE

Though we may not be realizing it all the time, our every act has a bearing on our future. Some might say that "I live in present and do not think about the future" or "I take the life as it comes, I don't plan for future" or may argue that what's going to happen will happen, but the reality is that who controls the present, controls the future. Young children growing into adolescents with mental health problems or getting involved in criminal acts is not their failure, but it is a failure of the society, the family and the medical profession. It is our failure to provide them a conducive environment to shape-up as balanced persons who could have proven useful to the society. Friends, let us not miss any opportunity to modify a life in positive manner by virtue of our wide and deep access to the minds of parents.

EVERY CHILD NEEDS TO BE NURTURED

We are all gifted by the mother nature, but we have to discover the gift, uncover it, nurture and develop it for the glory of the future. Nobody is born as an expert. Competing at the highest level is not about winning, it's about preparation, courage, understanding and nurturing the young minds. The process that begins prenatally – and continues in infancy and childhood – is significantly influenced by genetic, environmental and social factors, which either promote or undermine brain development [1]. Factors like war, domestic violence, prenatal dysfunction, media exposure, and socioeconomic stress set the life course trajectory for an individual. If you want to grow a giant tree, you need to make sure that seeds are good, nurture the sapling, and work out the factors that may potentially stop it from growing all the way along. If mind, body and spirit is nurtured, child will gain new perspectives, which will allow him/her to accomplish much more. Unfortunately, our schooling system, instead of nurturing creativity kills it unwittingly. Parents too fall in similar trap. That is why several great minds could never adjust in school and dropped-out to become all time greats. Child should be allowed to nurture imagination, ideas, alternatives and beliefs that the things are always not the way they need to be.

THE CHALLENGES

Illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and malnutrition are the key challenging areas. Millions are at risk of infections (e.g., diarrhea, pneumonia, tuberculosis, vaccine-preventable diseases) or non-communicable diseases, and do not meet their growth potential due to lack of nutrition and availability of healthcare during illness. Premature and low birth weight babies have their own special needs for which only we can guide. The promises and speeches made in meetings will not prove to be useful if changes are not brought in the life of the people living in the towns and villages.

Women and children face risks in particular. Sadly, still there are many people who do not have access to health-care facilities; we need to be pull them out of the vicious cycle of poverty and ill health [2]. Then there are millions who may be economically little better than the marginalized population, but still do not have access to quality healthcare. Services of specialist practitioners may not be affordable to a large group of population, but we should find ways so that we are not out of bounds for at least some percentage of less privileged class, when they need our expertise. The satisfaction we get by helping a poor patient is extra special – nearly divine. In this manner we all are actively and proudly involved in nurturing the future.

HOW CAN WE MAKE LIFE OF OUR CHILDREN BETTER

“The greatest legacy one can pass on to one’s children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one’s life, but rather a legacy of character and faith.” – Billy Graham

We see so many children losing their childhood at the altar of their parents’ ambitions. So many of them lose their potential to succeed because they are forced to carry the burden of unrealistic expectations. As famously attributed to Albert Einstein, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. The question that should be asked is – What is your genius ?” The folly to try to judge all children with uniform standard results in so many frustrated young children. I feel that our role is definitely under-utilized in correcting these widely prevalent issues in the society. We have that reach to the minds of mothers and fathers like none other. When we preside over the well-being of a child’s health right up to adolescence, we are in a position to sow the right seeds in the minds of the parents. There are only two lasting bequests we can help parents give their children – the roots and the wings. The morals, ethics, empathy and kindness is not taught in classrooms but is learnt at home by role modeling of parents. It’s not only about what you tell your children, but how you show them how to live life. It is only when we start appreciating the individual differences, tolerate mistakes of others, and communicate openly; an ideal atmosphere of a nurturing family, school or society will develop.

NEED TO KEEP A WATCH ON CHILDREN

Parents need to teach children how to judiciously use the social media, and make the right decisions. We can help many debacles if we are aware of the various pitfalls. It’s a relatively new phenomenon of parenting but is of vital importance as most of the action is now taking place in the virtual world. If the child gets trapped in this world, it may be as hazardous as drug menace.

Make sure your child chooses her/his idols carefully. Fame and notoriety do not always promote wisdom and decency. One of the greatest Indian warriors, the Great Shivaji, was nurtured by his mother Jijabai by reciting the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Can you imagine the difference in future of our country if children idolize the brave soldiers who fought for the honour of our country, or the great sports persons who brought glory to the country? If a child comes across such real-life stories, he or she might think, “hey, if this person can do it, why can’t I.” Our good teachers are our idols. We may not realize, but many of us may be idols for children visiting us

for seeking healthcare. Thus, we have a responsibility to act as a role model. Little bit of good listening helps cultivate emotional nurturing and engagement. By nurturing the minds and strengthening the values of our children, we can provide them the opportunity to be a productive citizen, and to reach their optimum potential.

IMPORTANCE OF INSTILLING THE RIGHT QUALITIES

We need to nurture the qualities of aesthetics, affection, intuition, curiosity, and instinct to seek solutions. Perhaps a leader can learn from a gardener who is so good at nurturing with patience, tenderness and persistence. Whole life is all about nurturing the present, which will eventually lay the foundation of the future. IAP has so many programs which provide leadership and mentoring opportunities to its members. Parents need to be taught how to nurture the dreams of their children, how to make their children dream big, and be careful

how they water it – with optimism and solutions, and not with worries and fear. We have the responsibility to nurture the young minds with great thoughts.

There is no picture as beautiful as a smiling bright-eyed, happy child; and no music as sweet as their clear and ringing laughter. So when your pains result in a innocent smile of a child or thankfulness in the eyes of the mother, it's all gain – worth every bit of effort towards nurturing the future.

REFERENCES

1. Rushton FE, Kraft C. Building brains, forgoing futures: The pediatrician's role. *International Journal of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. 2014;1:3-7.
2. Bruntland GH. World Health Organization set out the Strategic Challenges for WHO at the 53rd World Health Assembly Geneva 15 May 2000. Available from: <https://www.hs-j.co.uk/speech/gro1.htm>. Accessed May 13, 2019.

