

The Under-Fives' Clinic

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SUMMARY

An account is given of an Under-Fives' Clinic at a rural hospital in Andhra Pradesh. It is emphasised that the technique is widely applicable and is a practical method to combat the high morbidity and mortality in pre-school children in India. Education and health promotion are essential parts of the clinic along with the management of illness. A personal weight card is the basic record of the clinic. This provides continuous nutritional assessment, details of illness, immunisations, and the parents' attitude to family planning. A responsible delegation of the routine work to staff nurses, trained for the purpose, gives them professional satisfaction and frees the doctor to supervise, train and see the seriously ill.

1. Introduction

'The pattern in developing countries is such that an extraordinary burden of disease and death falls on small children. In these countries 35-60 per cent of all deaths occur in children under five, who make up 17 per cent of the total population'.

The Under-Fives' Clinic is a practical approach to this problem^{2,3,4}. It is not simply an out-patient department for small children, it has a more far-reaching significance.

- (a) It is relevant to the modern combined approach of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Family Planning (FP) services.
- (b) It is widely applicable, and can be modified for a village clinic or a medical college out-patient department. Sophisticated equipment and highly specialised staff are not necessary.
- (c) It demonstrates that a responsible delegation of duties can produce a better and more comprehensive service.

2. Aims of the Under-Fives' Clinic

- 2.1 To provide the vulnerable children under five years of age with a medical service related to their particular needs; immunization and nutritional care in addition to the treatment of disease.
- 2.2 To educate parents and promote health and family planning as an essential part of the service.
- 2.3 To simplify the routine and delegate responsibility to nurses and others so that the education and promotional aspects will not be neglected in a busy clinic.

The importance of certain aspects may have to be

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explained to the parents, for example weighing of children may be considered unnecessary, so the close link between adequate growth and health has to be emphasized.

3. Organisation of the Clinic

The clinic described has been running for two years as the C.S.I. Hospital, Jammala madugu in rural Andhra Pradesh. This is held each morning on a large verandah and although adaptations may have to be made to suit individual situations, the basic principles hold good.

It must be emphasized that the most important aspect of the clinic is the consultation, that is, the interview between the nurse and the parent of the child⁵. The basic tool of the clinic is a graphic weight chart for each child, which records progress and is the starting point for health teaching^{6,7}.

3.1. Line of Flow

Line-of-Flow simply means a logical series of steps within a clinic so that no important aspect of care is neglected.

On arrival a mother is welcomed by a clerk who registers the child and records details of his age and family on the special weight chart that will be retained by the parents. These cards are the basic records, and on them much of the teaching and many of the activities of the clinic are centred. We also have a hospital-retained record on which are entered details of investigations and medication, etc. However, in village clinics, a simple card, kept in the plastic cover with the weight chart, is adequate and means there is no need for the paraphernalia of a filing system.

After registration each child is weighed by a health demonstrator who has had no professional training but has been specifically taught to weigh and record accurately on the weight card. There is a dual-purpose waiting and teaching area where the mothers sit until it is their turn to see the nurse. Here they receive not only short formal instruction, but also informal, as they overhear what the nurse tells other mothers. The rota of topics presented and the instructions are shown in Table 1. An attempt is made to involve the mothers in these sessions so that the teaching is partly a dialogue and there are demonstrations of actual foods and health techniques. The children are seen by the nurses in the order in which they arrive, but if a child is obviously desperately ill, an attempt is made to deal with him at once.

TABLE 1

Under-Fives' Clinic—Teaching Rota

Monday	Child health and weight cards	
	The importance and use of the cards	
Tuesday	(a) Immunisation	Alternate weeks
	(b) Scabies and Skin sepsis	
Wednesday	(a) Diarrhoea	According to home management season
	(b) Sore eyes	