

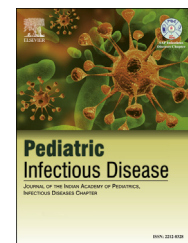


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## Editorial

# Training in pediatric infectious disease: Need of the time

In recent years, there has been increased coverage by the media on infectious diseases thereby making it one of the most debated topics amongst scientific and public forums. Public health officials, pharmaceutical professionals and policy makers need to understand the transmission patterns of infectious diseases, in order to be able to interpret and evaluate the epidemiological data and the findings of such studies. Most recently, mathematical models and newer techniques for measurement and analysis have been applied to outbreaks and emerging epidemics, such as influenza A (H1N1) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Many such infectious diseases remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, with HIV, tuberculosis and malaria estimated to cause 10% of all deaths each year. Worldwide, two thirds of all deaths in children under 5 years of age are caused by infectious diseases. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 17% of total mortality in children less than 5 years of age is due to vaccine preventable diseases.<sup>1</sup> This represents approximately 1.5 million of deaths. Infections like diphtheria (3485 cases in 2011),<sup>2</sup> malaria (yearly 1.5 million infections),<sup>3</sup> tuberculosis (1.9 million cases and 0.37 million people dying every year)<sup>4,5</sup> have a high negative impact on society, and there is a great deal to be done in terms of awareness, treatment and control strategies.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the prevention and treatment of these infections remains a top priority to achieve global health.

In India, clinical superspecialties such as neurology, cardiology, gastroenterology and nephrology are often preferred by medical students and hospitals, while infectious diseases as a specialty is frequently overlooked and thought to be less important. Is it time to revisit this concept? A course in infectious diseases will educate and train healthcare professionals and will help promote high quality advanced care and research by strengthening their knowledge. This could facilitate clinicians, researchers and academicians to intensely understand and be involved in surveillance, policy making, program implementation on infections that directly contribute to morbidity and mortality in children, including new and emerging infections like SARS, H1N1 influenza, dengue, and infectious diarrhea. These trained and specialized health professionals will be involved in testing and implementing vaccination strategies against common infections such as measles, rubella and polio. Such a training program would facilitate the formation of a 'think tank' of professionals who can be key opinion leaders guiding policy decisions.

Professionally-oriented training and education in pediatric infectious diseases is the 'need of the hour' and should be implemented on a "war footing" to achieve global health. I therefore, strongly feel that such a course will be useful not only for individuals interested in expanding their knowledge of the techniques available for analyzing and interpreting epidemiological data on infectious diseases, but also for the world and for India to achieve the goal of "health for all".

The Indian Academy of Pediatrics should come forward to establish a fellowship course in pediatric infectious diseases. The course and content can be worked out, and may be achieved through institutional participation, distant education, contact sessions, seminars, written and practical examinations. Importance can be given to infection control both in the hospital as well as the community, with a strong focus on public health. The existing Infectious Diseases Chapter should be upgraded into a full fledged 'Infectious Diseases Academy', which could develop a suitable syllabus for the fellowship course. In time, the course could be expanded to include nursing and paramedical professionals as well. It is time that the Indian Academy of Pediatrics and its Infectious Diseases Academy take a step forward and act fast to expand our pool of professionally trained and committed infectious disease experts who will play an active role in our children's health in the near future.

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2212-8328/\$ – see front matter  
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pid.2013.04.005>