A beautiful day for Minenhle

Minenhle’s name means “a beautiful day” which could not be more apt for this little girl who, after enduring more than three years of blindness due to medical misinformation, underwent successful cataract surgery and can finally see the world around her.

Minenhle’s mother noticed her daughter’s cataracts from birth but did not feel there was a need to seek help at first. When Minenhle was three she was walking in furniture and could no longer attend school.

Fortunately another visit to the local clinic resulted in Minenhle finally being referred to the Orbis Africa-funded Paediatric Eye Care Centre at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital.

After three years and four months Minenhle regained her sight and attends school again.

Research Aim

To assess the paediatric cataract surgical services in South Africa and Zambia focusing on the outcome of surgery, delay in presentation and loss to follow-up.

Study Design

Record and analyse reasons preventing good outcomes after paediatric cataract surgery using:
- Existing records
- Focus group discussions
- Interviews

This poster showcases selected findings from the qualitative aspect of the research at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Children’s Hospital (IALCH), KZN (March - May 2013).

Findings

Research findings indicated that a substantial delay of presentation, sometimes of many years, were related to transportation challenges, financial support, awareness of eye diseases as well as intergenerational conflicts and fears.

Socio-economic obstacles

South Africa, like many countries, suffers from under-resourced primary health care services, unemployment, unstable households and a weighty referral system. Eye health has not featured as a matter of urgency.

The cost of transportation contributed to delays in presentation for those who had to pay for their own transport to access care. Those living further away, in more rural settings, had transportation costs covered by the Department of Health.

In KZN many are blind unnecessarily as medical treatment is available to restore the sight of many. Unfortunately, as children age the opportunity to fully restore vision is diminished, strengthening the urgency to understand barriers to accessing ophthalmic services.

Orbis has been working in partnership with IALCH since 2010, to strengthen child eye health services through investing in human resources, providing equipment and consumables and raising public awareness about the importance of child eye health.

The Way Forward

This research was critical to ensure that barriers to access are clearly understood so that Orbis could develop appropriate and effective interventions including:
- Advocacy and programming focusing on establishing new ways for people to identify the differences between less serious eye conditions and those which could affect sight in the long term such as cataract, glaucoma and retinoblastoma
- Facilitating engagement with traditional healers to form a partnership to promote eye health
- Expanding its footprint from training at tertiary hospitals to community levels to strengthen referral systems
- Developing innovative messaging and advocacy strategies
- Developing and implementing training curriculum for Primary Health Care nurses with a view to include ECD practitioners and traditional healers