

EDITOR'S COMMENT

A good start to life



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In the foreword to Coovadia and Loening's textbook *Paediatrics and Child Health* Professor David Morely from London University asks a question that doctors in North America and Europe are now able to pose, 'Why are our children healthy?' This is certainly the case in developed countries, and indeed in the developed sectors of the developing world. The reason, of course, is the decline in mortality from the great killers of the past, namely infectious diseases. While this decline is certainly apparent in the leafy suburbs of affluent South Africa, it is, of course, not the case in the disadvantaged areas. This often leads to an emphasis on the problems of infant and child health in a Third World environment when teaching paediatrics in southern Africa, and is indeed the emphasis of Coovadia and Loening's excellent book.

However, there are many other problems encountered by infants and children, particularly in the more affluent areas of society, now that infectious diseases are largely conquered. As a result many doctors may well feel that their education is lacking in difficult areas such as neurodevelopment, neurological illness and coping with simple childhood difficulties such as bedwetting. This edition of *CME* provides an excellent reference work, covering just these types of topics in some detail. Professor Venter and his team of specialists have put together a collection of papers that should remain on the shelves for many years, providing the guide that is needed for assessment and referral of difficult conditions. His own article on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder is an excellent case in point.

Comprehensive and up to date, it should help any GP in the management of this difficult but not uncommon childhood problem. Language delay is another area that can be extremely difficult to assess, and Dr Jacklin's approach to the subject is simple, but with enough detail to allow the early assessment and referral that is essential to any child with this problem. Cerebral palsy and the floppy infant are two other neurodevelopmental topics that are particularly well covered, as is the management of epilepsy.

Moving away from neurodevelopment, bedwetting and the sometimes related problem of defaecation disorders are discussed in some detail, with pointers to management and advice on when to refer. Finally, but not least importantly, post-traumatic stress disorder in children is something that is particularly important in a society where child abuse is becoming all too frequent, and this article will help any GP understand the initial and post-referral management of these unfortunate children.

Many of these topics deal with conditions that most GPs would normally refer. But, after reading this edition of *CME*, you will be reaching for the phone with an excellent grounding in the problem, making discussion with a specialist that much easier. The GP is, or should be, the gatekeeper in medicine. The deeper your understanding of a problem, the greater your contribution.