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Infant Health Team:Community Awareness Initiative

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Dehydration due to diarrhea is a big public Health Problem in Pakistan. Health statistics of Pakistan show that an infant of one year of age is estimated to suffer from an average of 8 episodes of diarrhea per year. Several factors contribute to the high diarrhea morbidity and mortality. Most important factor that I evaluated as a clinician in 1000 bedded hospital was the poor hygienic practices related to cleaning milk bottles for infants. Infants were brought to the hospital from the surrounding villages in severely dehydrated conditions, since a valuable time is lost in transportation of infants to hospital and parents did not have the knowledge of beneficial effect of simple solution of sugar, salt and water. I started a community based outreach initiative that involved education of parents living in the villages surrounding my hospital, about the instantaneous effects Oral Dehydration Therapy (ORT) in saving the lives of their infants and providing sachets of Oral Rehydration Salt (ORS) to the parents so that they can treat their infants quickly and save critical time of bringing the infant to the hospital. The project started in 1993 and I was the part of the project till 1997. Initially, we selected 7 villages and each village had on the average 300 households and around 250 infants. By 1996, the coverage had increased to 31 villages. I was part of the project from 1993 until 1997.

The project produced good results. The infant's referral from the surrounding villages to the hospital declined by 16% in four years. There was a 21% reduction in infant deaths due to dehydration caused by diarrhea.