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Adolescent Medicine: The need for a nation-wide service in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: The adolescent period, is a unique developmental stage which is characterized by physical, psychosocial, social and cognitive changes as transition from childhood to adulthood. In this communication, we highlight the importance of establishing adolescent medical service, and call on the higher strategic planners in Saudi Arabia to establish a country wide program to improve the health wellbeing of the youth.

Keywords: adolescent, medicine, nation-wide, service, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent Medicine, the so called "Hebiatrics" is the subspecialty that focuses on the care of patient who are in the adolescent period, generally ranging from 9 to 20 years. Patients have generally entered puberty. It is a unique developmental stage, which is characterized by physical, psychosocial, social and cognitive changes as they transition from childhood to adulthood. The aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of the youths, through specialized multidisciplinary services [1-3].

Over the last few decades adolescent medicine has achieved a distinct role. A combination of changes in clinical practice, scientific advances, a growing adolescent population and social changes have contributed to defining the need [1-4].

This communication aims to highlight the importance of adolescent medicine and call on the higher strategic planners in Saudi Arabia to establish and plan special services to improve the health well beings of the youth.

Adolescent Medicine

The need to establish a subspecialty in Saudi Arabia

Over the past few decades, it has been well recognized and accepted in North America and Europe, that practicing medicine with adolescents is very different from caring for an infant, young children, and adults. The scientific literature has reinforced this, and currently, there is a growth of peer-reviewed Journals that is being published [1]. A major advances have been made in understanding that adolescent period is remarkable and unique time for profound brain health and development [5]. There has also been a dramatic change in neuro-endocrine functions and puberty [6-7]. Adolescent medicine has played a pivotal role as a

leader in promoting interdisciplinary approach to clinical care and health research. The rises in the number of youth in Saudi Arabia, and enhanced medical care and technology have resulted in a more survival in children with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and asthma. These achievements have had a dramatic impact on furthering this subspecialty [1, 3, 8-10].

In addition to this pressing need to provide in-depth and comprehensive training in adolescent medicine for individuals who intend to do subspecialty training in this area, there is the need for expertise and resources to train core pediatric residents as well. Adolescent medicine is now a requirement of core pediatric residency.

Meeting the increased demand

Despite this clearly recognized need for additional adolescent medicine subspecialists, there is already a shortage of qualified people. Additionally, the number of newly created positions should grow as the subspecialty gains recognition. This demand for additional adolescent medicine resources will result in the need for more subspecialty training programs that are able to educate physicians in a comprehensive and standardized way.

What a subspecialty in adolescent medicine will accomplish?

The recognition of adolescent medicine as a pediatric subspecialty will accomplish the following:

- The higher quality of care focused on improving the health outcomes and well-being of adolescents and their families. Adolescent medicine specialists will enhance the coordination of developmentally appropriate care provided to adolescents, offer

consultation and assistance with respect to the appreciation and integration of adolescent-specific issues in their treatment plans, and play an advocacy role for the involvement of the young person in treatment decisions. The net result of these changes will be improved treatment outcomes for the health of the youth.

- New research advances and clinical initiatives are essential for better health practices and outcomes. Adolescent medicine-trained subspecialists will play an important role in the development, transfer and dissemination of this knowledge to adolescents, their families, communities and other health care professionals caring for young people.
- Further support for the inclusion of adolescent medicine as a critical component of pediatric residency programs. Currently, pediatric residents have inconsistent training in this area, even though many new pediatricians will eventually provide general health care to this age group. Attention must be paid to ensuring that there is training and support for pediatric residents and fellows, as well as physicians and allied health professionals caring for adolescents. Additionally, a major educational role of the adolescent medicine specialist will be to work directly with youth, their families and the community at large around relevant topics in adolescent health. Enhancement of the adolescent medicine component of pediatric training programs, inclusion of continuing educational efforts addressing adolescent health topics and the provision of educational sessions to the lay public will all serve to improve the general health and well-being of adolescents.
- An accredited adolescent medicine training program is more likely to attract the higher quality trainee, and retain pediatricians for subspecialty training in pursuing a career in adolescent medicine will train and practice in a country where adolescent medicine is an accredited subspecialty because such programs have established rigorous standards for subspecialty training and ongoing monitoring of the training programs. They are recognized for the additional level of training they received and compensation is commensurate with their level of training. Such programs provide an academic infrastructure that supports research, teaching, clinical care and advocacy in adolescent medicine, as well as provide opportunities for interested pediatricians to pursue an academic career in adolescent medicine.
- Clinical care for adolescents with complex biopsychosocial health problems can be time- and resource-intensive, involving multidisciplinary meetings and coordination with other health care

professionals. Accreditation will likely result in a greater number of training positions in adolescent medicine, attend to the short supply of subspecialties, and address the funding inequities and compensation issues related to comprehensive and specialized clinical services.

- Improved access to adolescent-trained subspecialties could potentially result in cost savings to the health care system and better quality of care for the adolescent patient by decreasing unnecessary utilization of emergency rooms, multiple clinic visits to various health care providers and possibly even a reduction in unwarranted investigations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, adolescent medicine is a new and rapidly developing specialty. In Saudi Arabia, with a rapidly advancing health care system, there is a need to establish a subspecialty to help in promoting the health and well-being of the youth.

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