PRACTICAL MOTHER AND CHILD HEALTH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

G. J. EBRAHIM

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and

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Preface

Two thirds of humanity lives in the developing world, where 80 per cent or more of the population lives in rural areas. Young people under the age of fifteen and women in child bearing age comprise more than half of the population of an average developing country. It is surprising that no special services have been evolved for these groups. True there are obstetric, paediatric, nutrition and preventive services. But these are compartmentalised and rarely, if ever, become integrated enough to be called a service for promoting the health of mothers and children within the family and community environment.

Mother and Child Health (MCH) is not a new speciality. It is a method of delivering health care to the most vulnerable groups in society. In many countries existing health services are oriented towards providing a high standard of care for the urban populations. More than three-quarters of the recurrent health budget of the average developing country is spent on curative care which is, of necessity, based on hospitals in large towns and cities. A large proportion of the health manpower is also engaged in these hospitals. Even though a variety of health programmes are expected to reach out of the hospitals to the wider community, in effect this is hardly so. Several evaluations of health care in different countries have revealed that not more than 20 per cent of the rural population is adequately covered with basic health services.

Teaching programmes generally reflect the administrative arrangements in the health service. In the medical and nursing curriculum time is allotted for the teaching of obstetrics, paediatrics, nutrition and preventive and social medicine. It is taken for granted that synthesis will take place in the mind of the student and an understanding of mother and child health will eventually occur. There is little evidence to support such a belief, and a thorough revision of training curricula is necessary to create a place for proper training in mother and child health.

In the rural areas, in shanty towns and even in many inner city areas health care for mothers and children is usually the responsibility of auxiliaries. It is all the more necessary that they receive adequate

training in the subject. A sound knowledge of mother and child health is also important for the physician and the paediatrician because they are called upon to co-ordinate all MCH activities in their district or area.

This book arose out of the author's experience in Tanzania. As the only paediatrician in the country for ten years after independence he was engaged in developing child health services and in setting up relevant training programmes. Since then as tutor to the WHO/UNICEF sponsored Course for Senior Teachers of Child Health for eight years there have been opportunities for studying the health problems in the rural areas of several countries. As a result of these experiences extensive revision and addition of new material has been made in the present edition of the book.

Practical Mother and Child Health in Developing Countries is one of a set of four manuals which comprise the Health Centre Set, and is intended for the community health nurse at the rural health centre. Each of the other manuals in the set is intended for a specific member of the health team. It is hoped that these texts will contribute to improving the standards of care and the teaching of mother and child health in the developing world.