

Maternal-infant Child Health and Environment Research Symposium:
“How Local Research can Influence Policy and Practice”

Thursday, February 26th, 2009, 08:00-17:00 hrs
Maple Leaf Room, Lister Conference Centre, University of Alberta

Poster Presentation: Irena Buka, Piotr Klakowicz, Alvaro Osornio-Vargas, Samuel Koranteng

Local, national, and international partners work collaboratively to improve the health of children

Environmental influences on children’s health.

Attention is being focused on the interacting environments impacting the developing fetus, infant, child, and adolescent, and the ensuing health effects that are difficult and costly to treat often persisting into adulthood.

Determinants of health include many social and physical factors including gene environment interactions.

Major public health successes include water hygiene and sanitation, and immunizations. Medical technological advances allowing for detection and treatment of diseases have contributed to greater life expectancy.

As countries become more wealthy through industrial and technological advancement, the new childhood epidemics include asthma, neurodevelopmental behavioral disorders, consequences of pre-term birth, congenital anomalies, etc.

Why are we taking this approach?

The economic burdens of these conditions impact budgets for health, social programs, education, judiciary systems, etc. The emotional burden is difficult to quantify.

Individual and public health interventions rely on education of not only health professionals, but society at large to identify issues and take appropriate action. As health professionals assume clinical responsibility for environmental disorders, they quickly become involved with schools, social services, lawyers, policymakers, etc. Prevention of environmentally related disorders through education, regulation, and legislation is a vision for improved health in children.

Putting the partnership to work.

Our partnerships are building a strong interface between the patient, community, and policy by collecting and disseminating local evidence.

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The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit in Edmonton is an initiative of local and international University partners, governments, and other organizations working together to advance child health. A program is being built around identified clinical issues in children exploring associated environmental influences, and building bridges with policy makers to mitigate effects of adverse environmental factors. This is an evidence based program supported by collaborative research to address local concerns and their often far-reaching consequences.

The Department of Pediatrics, Stollery Children’s Hospital, University of Alberta is building an innovative partnership with academia and government so that science can better inform policy and practice to improve the health of children.

IMPLICATIONS

Using clinical observations and research data to identify environmental influences on common children's disorders can help to prioritize legislative and regulatory actions to protect children from environmental threats. Furthermore this collaboration and partnership between academia and government can lead to better clinical care, education leading to improved personal responsibility for health, protective public health interventions and preventive actions that can result not only in better health but also a reduced burden on the health care system.