Including eye care in the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) programme in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has successfully integrated primary eye health care for children into the country’s Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) programme.

Community health workers attached to facilities delivering IMCI were also requested to promote awareness about eye conditions in children in the community.

IMCI staff members started screening children in July 2018, and referring cases requiring further eye care to the sub-district medical officer for treatment or referral to the district hospital ophthalmologist. The technical group members conducted regular monitoring and supportive supervision to monitor the quality of care and reporting. The IMCI national database (District Health Information Software 2 [DHIS2] of the Director General of Health Services) was modified to include eye conditions in children, and health facilities used this system for monthly reporting.

Based on the lessons learned from the pilot project, the ministry of health and family welfare included the eye care component of the IMCI protocol in the National Newborn Health and IMCI programme and scaled it up nationwide. A budget was allocated in the National Newborn Health operational plan to train IMCI staff. National data are being recorded in the updated DHIS2 platform, and the National Newborn Health programme monitors and provides supportive supervision. All these initiatives led to an increasing number of children benefiting from eye care services.

Lessons learned
IMCI staff could screen and refer cases confidently after basic training. Additional in-service training increased performance.

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The eye care component of the IMCI was included in monthly facility coordination meetings, which increased awareness among all stakeholders.

Health promotion by community health workers increased awareness of eye conditions and referrals from the community to primary health care clinics. Good follow-up, coordination, and strong referral mechanisms improved the quality of eye care. Including IMCI (which now has the eye care component) in the curriculum of medical, nursing, and paramedical students, increases effectiveness.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Integrating eye care into the IMCI program is a feasible, efficient, effective and sustainable way to provide primary eye health care for children in Bangladesh. Basic equipment, logistical support and training, with refresher training as trained staff may be transferred, are essential. Incorporating eye care into IMCI is an excellent example of enhancing available resources to address avoidable blindness in children by strengthening the health system to ensure universal eye care in Bangladesh.