

Vitamin A Programme in Afghanistan

Dear Sir

Since 1966, the NOOR Eye Institute (NEI), as part of the International Assistance Mission (IAM), has been serving the people of Afghanistan by providing ophthalmic training and eye care. NEI is running 3 eye care programmes based in different parts of Afghanistan: Kabul, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif and has known for many years that there is a large problem of vitamin A malnutrition. Preliminary survey work has been carried out to examine the extent of the problem. The results, although carried out on a small scale and, therefore, statistically unreliable, are shocking. The problem appears to be far worse than NEI had previously estimated, although the findings are consistent with anecdotal reports from doctors at our hospitals. Other findings from surveys done by international NGOs confirm that the general malnutrition situation in Afghanistan is extremely poor. This survey does not examine the most potentially at risk group, pre-school children.

School Screening Survey Results (See Table)

Two primary schools were visited from September to November 1997, and the survey was carried out by ophthalmic technician students accompanied by one expatriate ophthalmic nurse.



Corneal scarring after vitamin A deficiency affecting an Afghan boy

Photo: Murray McGavin

School children found showing signs of xerophthalmia were treated immediately with 200,000 I.U. of vitamin A.

NEI has formed a Vitamin A Committee, an action plan for vitamin A intervention and has begun distribution of vitamin A, while actively encouraging other NGOs in Afghanistan to do the same.

NEI seeks to work with concerned organizations to address the serious vitamin A problem in Afghanistan. We invite your comments and input. Please direct your correspondence to the mailing address given below.

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Screening: Two Primary Schools, Afghanistan		
Age: No of Children	Classification of Xerophthalmia	
7-10 years : 794	X1A	0.6%
	X1B	5.28%
	XN	5.54%
	Total	11.42%
Over 10 years : 149	X1A	0%
	X1B	2%
	XN	4%
	Total	6%
Overall Total All Ages Indicators for Xerophthalmia 10.6%		