Prospects of Eradicating Poliomyelitis by 2007: Compulsory Vaccination May be a Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The polio eradication has reached at a critical juncture. The progress was good until year 2000, and since then no major success has been achieved. The year 2006 can easily be termed as 'nightmare period' as there was sudden increase of polio cases in the affected countries this year. The threats of re-emergence and importation continued. The apprehensions became stronger, while the target elusive. This situation requires an immediate decisive action, by the international health community, to eradicate polio at the earliest possible. This article draws some lessons from polio eradication program in last two decades, along with analyzing the concept, feasibility and applicability of compulsory vaccination for achieving the goal of polio eradication by the end of the year 2007. [Indian J Pediatr 2007; 74 (1) : 61-63] E-mail: ck1800@rediffmail.com; ck1800@gmail.com

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The success of smallpox eradication was a factor before the 42nd World Health assembly1 to pass a resolution for polio eradication by the year 2000. The achievements in polio eradication were remarkable in the beginning but the program started to lose its tempo and the eradication target of year 2000 could not be achieved. Although, the number of polio cases from world had declined from 350,000 before the WHA resolution to a few hundred at present2, polio has continued to exist. The last 5-6 years (Year 2000 onwards) can easily be called a ‘nightmare period’ in polio eradication and between Year 2001 to 2005, the number of polio cases and the number of endemic countries, has remained almost constant and, despite of the reinforced, re-planned efforts, a stronger network of the volunteers and health personnel and, every newer round covering more number of children then previous one, making this program one of the biggest public health effort ever, Polio cases are being reported from different parts of the world.

An analysis of the polio cases in last 5 years and first half of the current year (Year 2006) shows that the total number of polio cases has increased continuously since 2001, with an exception in year 2002. The number of countries endemic to polio has remained almost constant during this period. The year 2005 had another characteristic of occurrence of more cases of polio in non-endemic countries (n=1046) than endemic countries (n=904). In the current year (2006), the total number of polio cases in India and number of other countries are higher than similar period last year. The number of affected countries have remained same (n=14).3 The apprehensions about eradication of polio are increasing and target is becoming elusive. The re-emergence and importation has become newer threats.

Eradication programs appear to be conceptually simple but the experience has taught us that they need the efforts of extra ordinary magnitude at all the fronts. The Polio eradication need to be achieved as soon as possible as it has become a matter of international prestige that world community can unite together for a common cause and be successful. The efforts can not be stopped here and let another generation cripple with the scourge of Polio. For, if the international community stops now, the idea of eradication will suffer irreparable damage, not to count loss of the faith placed by millions of mothers in the vaccines invented by Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. It would also not be fair to the millions of volunteers who have worked religiously for the campaign world over. In the light of such developments, the current strategy need rethinking and the hindrance in eradication like importation and re-emergence need earnest remedy.

Experts have opined that eradication programs need significant level of societal and political commitment from beginning to the end, and considering enormous cost of the failure, any proposal for eradication should be given intense scrutiny.4 What probably is the most important cause attributable to the failure in endemic countries is lack of societal and political commitment. Reasons may
The concept of compulsory vaccination for implementation of the same. There are recorded evidences of legislation being enacted to eradicate polio in a number of countries time and again. Practiced both for routine immunisation and smallpox in the earlier century in various forms. There are evidences of legislation being enacted for implementation of the same. The article clarifies that this concept does not mean that every individual necessarily get himself or his child immunised. There was a rule under this concept that one can refuse to get vaccinated by legal declaration of his refusal on whatever ground may be religious or any belief related. In such cases, people were not forced for vaccination. Compulsory vaccination may be justifiable at this stage. The supporters can counterpoint that it ensures greater protection and benefits at community level. It diminishes the autonomy of the vaccinee or the parents. Compulsory vaccination can be justified for eradication. The decisive action of the people involved is a forgone conclusion. Second, the decision of the people involved is a forgone conclusion. Thirdly, the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of their children. The decisive action of the people involved is a forgone conclusion. The supports can counterpoint that it ensures greater protection and benefits at community level. It diminishes the autonomy of the vaccinee or the parents. Compulsory vaccination can be justified for eradication. The decisive action of the people involved is a forgone conclusion. Second, the decision of the people involved is a forgone conclusion. Thirdly, the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of their children.
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