Introduction

The aim of this training manual on child health care is to improve the quality of life of children in all communities, especially in poor periurban and rural districts of southern Africa. Although the manual was written as a self-help learning course for both nurses and doctors, it can also be used in the training of medical and nursing students, particularly in under resourced areas.

The contributors to the manual are paediatricians and paediatric nurses who have a particular interest in both health-worker education and the wellbeing of children. They provided source material and reviewed the draft manuscript. Wide participation ensured a balanced and up-to-date approach to common and important clinical conditions and assists at reaching consensus on the management of most paediatric problems.

PAEDIATRIC EDUCATION

If a high standard of child health care is to be provided within district and regional health care systems, continuous education and training of all staff is essential. Unfortunately this is often achieved in the tertiary-care hospitals only and not in the secondary- or primary-care centres. The providers of primary care in rural areas usually have the least training as they are furthest away from the centralised training hospitals. It is not possible to send teachers to all these areas for long periods of time while staff shortages and domestic reasons make it impractical to transfer large numbers of doctors and nurses from primary- and secondary-care centres to tertiary hospitals for training. Ideally all medical and nursing staff should have regular training to improve and update their theoretical knowledge and practical skills. One way of meeting the goal of continuing education is with a self-help, outreach educational programme. This method allows participants to take responsibility for their own learning and professional growth. They can study at their own pace at a time and place which suits them. The education programme should be cheap and, if possible, not require a tutor. It should promote identifying and solving clinical problems within the broader context of a compassionate, caring community.

THE PERINATAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

This paediatric education manual is based on the very successful Perinatal Education Programme, which has brought opportunities for continuing training to thousands of midwives, neonatal nurses and doctors in southern Africa. The same method of learning has been used, as has the general design and layout.
HOW THIS COURSE WORKS

Throughout this learning programme the participant takes full responsibility for his or her own progress. This method teaches the individual to become self-reliant and confident.

Also see ‘The course step-by-step’ at the end of this introduction.

The objectives

At the start of each unit the learning objectives are clearly stated. They help the participant to identify and understand the important lessons to be learned.

Questions and answers

Theoretical knowledge is taught using a problem-solving method of learning which encourages the participant to actively participate in the education process. An important question is asked, or problem posed, followed by the correct answer or explanation. In this way, the participant is led step by step through the definitions, causes, diagnosis, prevention, dangers and management of a particular problem.

It is suggested that the participant covers the answer for a few minutes with a piece of paper or card while thinking about the correct reply to each question. This method helps learning.

Different styles of text are used to identify particular sections of the programme:

Each question is written in bold letters and is identified by the number of the unit followed by the number of the specific question, e.g. 3-23 for unit 3, question 23.

Case studies

A number of clinical presentations in story-form are given at the end of each unit so that the participant can apply his or her newly learned knowledge to solve some common clinical problems. This exercise also gives the participant an opportunity to see the problem as it usually presents itself in the clinic or hospital. A brief history and/or summary of the clinical examination is given, followed by a series of questions. The participant should attempt to answer each question before referring to the correct answer. The knowledge presented in the cases is the same as that covered earlier in that unit. The cases, therefore, serve to consolidate the participant’s knowledge and place it in a clinical context.

Multiple-choice tests

An in-course assessment is made at the beginning and end of each unit in the form of a test consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions. The aim of the multiple-choice tests is to allow participants to monitor their own progress through the programme by determining how much they know before starting a unit, and how much they have learned at the end of the unit. The pre-test (done before reading the unit) draws attention to what the participant does not yet know. The post-test (done after reading the unit) helps participants decide whether they have successfully learned the important facts in that unit, and will also draw their attention to the areas where their knowledge is still inadequate. The multiple-choice tests are found at the back of the book.

In the multiple-choice tests the participant is asked to choose the single, most correct answer to each question or statement from 4 possible answers. A separate sheet is provided for recording the test answers before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the unit is studied. Participants usually mark their own pre-tests and post-tests when both have been completed. The list of correct answers indicates which section should be studied again for each incorrect post-test answer.

NOTE Additional, interesting, but non-essential information is provided in these Notes. This material is not used in the case studies or included in the multiple choice questions.
Study groups

It is strongly advised that the programme is studied by a group and not by individuals alone. This introduces the concepts of co-operative learning and peer tuition. Each group of 5 to 10 participants should be managed by a local co-ordinator who is often one of the participants. The local co-ordinator obtains permission from the health authority and then arranges the time and venue of regular group meetings (usually every 3 weeks). At the meeting the unit just studied is discussed. If a participant does not understand a particular section, there is usually someone else who does. After the group discussion the post-test of that unit is completed as is the pre-test of the next unit.

The importance of a caring and questioning attitude

A caring and questioning attitude is encouraged. The welfare of the patient is of the greatest importance, while an enquiring mind is essential if health care workers are to continue improving their knowledge and skills. The participant is also taught to solve practical problems and to form a simple, logical approach to common paediatric disorders.

Final assessment

On completion of this course, the participant may apply to write a formal multiple-choice examination to assess the amount of knowledge that they have acquired. All the questions will be taken from the tests at the end of each unit. The results of the in-course testing will not count towards the final assessment. A certificate will be given to participants who achieve a mark of 80% in the final examination.

THE WEBSITE

The website at www.childhealthcare.co.za is an ever-growing resource for those using this book.

USING THE PROGRAMME AS A WORK MANUAL

It is hoped that as many students as possible will use this book as a work manual after they have completed the course. Together with national protocols, the book will help standardise the prevention, diagnosis and management of certain clinical problems. This is particularly useful when patients are referred within or between health-care regions. Every opportunity to share knowledge with both patients and colleagues should be used. By doing this, participants will find their careers more fulfilling, and will help to improve child health in their region.

EDUHEALTHCARE

The development of this course has been funded by the not-for-profit organisation Eduhealthcare.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

This course has been produced by a group of child-health specialists after wide consultation with colleagues who practice in both rural and urban settings, in an attempt to reach consensus on the health care of children. The programme is designed so that it can be altered to keep pace with current developments in health care. Participants using the programme can make an important contribution to its continual improvement by reporting sections that they have difficulty understanding. Details of alternative or better forms of management would be particularly appreciated. Please send any comments or suggestions by post to Child Health Care, Electric Book Works, 87 Station Road, Observatory 7925, Cape Town, South Africa; or by email to info@childhealthcare.co.za.
THE COURSE STEP-BY-STEP

1
Before you start each chapter, take the test for that chapter at the back of the book. Do this by yourself even if you are studying with a group of colleagues. Choose the best answer for each multiple choice question and note your answers on a piece of paper. This is called your 'pre-test' for that chapter. There is an answer sheet that you should use to mark your completed pre-test. Record your pre-test mark out of 20.

2
Work through the chapter. Read each question and answer, and make sure you understand it. Pay particular attention to the facts in grey boxes. Read the case studies to check whether you have learned the important information.

3
When you think you have learned all the knowledge in that chapter, take the same test again. This second test is called your 'post-test'. Now mark the post-test and compare your pre-test and post-test marks. Your marks should have improved considerably. In the answers section in the book, opposite each correct answer is the number of the section where the question was taken from. Re-read and learn the sections for any post-test answers you got incorrect. Now you are ready to move on to the next chapter.

4
Repeat steps 1 to 3 for each chapter as you work your way through the book. This enables you to monitor your progress and measure how much you are learning. Most people will take between four and eight months to finish the full course.

5
Once you are confident that you have mastered all the main lessons in the book, apply to write the final examination. You can use the form at the back of this book (make a photocopy or remove the page), or you can get the application form online at www.childhealthcare.co.za. To write the final examination, you will need to have a Course Code. This is a unique number that entitles you to write the examination for this course. If you don't have one yet, you or your group can buy Course Codes. The fee and how to pay is given below. This Course Code will only work once for one examination.

6
You will receive the examination paper, consisting of 50 multiple-choice questions, by post. Set aside at least an hour to write the examination. When you write the examination, do not use the book to look up the correct answers. Remember, you are your own teacher, so be strict with yourself!

7
When you have completed the examination, post your completed examination paper back to the address on the examination paper.

8
If you get 80% or better, you will receive a certificate stating that you have successfully completed this course. If you failed to achieve 80%, you can apply to write the examination again. (You will need to purchase another Course Code to write the examination again.)

Tips

- Work through the course with a group of friends or colleagues.
- One person in your group (your ‘convenor’) should take responsibility for organising meetings to discuss each chapter before you write the post-test.
- Arrange for everyone to write the examination at the same time.
- Set yourself targets, such as ‘two units a month’.
- Keep your book with you to read whenever you have a chance.