

GROWTH STANDARDS AS A TOOL IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

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It is my great pleasure and honourable task to have the occasion fourth time to welcome all of you to our Symposium. The series of our Symposiums of Human Biology have already a nice tradition, and without any immodesty we can state that our preceding symposiums were successful.

In 1976, in Balatonfüred, in connection with the "summing up" phase of the International Biological Programme, the main subjects of our First Symposium of Human Biology were *Growth and Development* of children as well as the variations of human *Physique*, themes which had been in the centre of interest long ago. Our intention was at that time to open the Hungarian physical anthropology's/human biology's windows wide at the world.

In 1979, in Visegrád the main subject of our Second Symposium was the *Functional Biotypology*, and the overwhelming majority of the presentations dealt with different aspects of the human physique. However, several lectures touched the problems of growth and development of children, and so, we intended to contribute to the success of the International Children's Year.

In 1981, in Bozsok, during our Third Symposium, we discussed the *Variations of Human Growth and Physique*, especially four aspects of them: the genetical, the clinical, the ecological, and the kinanthropometrical sides of this problem-circle.

The multidisciplinary character of our Symposiums was ensured.

This time (in 1986, in Pécs) as main topic of our Fourth Symposium we have chosen the *Growth Standards*, again a theme which was in the forefront of interest of as human biologists as well as pediatricians decades ago.

What does cause this great interest?

Simply two facts, I think. Firstly, a lot of us have a feeling of responsibility for the children's welfare, and secondly, growth and development data constitute a comprehensive and sensitive indicator specific to child health.

But, it seems to be worthy surveying some ambitions all over the world. Let us remember the International Conference on Primary Health Care organized in Alma-Ata in September 1978, and jointly sponsored by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Found. This conference declared the basic principle „*Health for all by 2000!*”.

The Declaration of Alma-Ata strongly reaffirms that "health, which is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, is a fundamental human right and that the attainment of the highest possible level of health is a most important world-wide social goal whose realization requires the action of many other social and economic sectors in addition to the health sector".

The Declaration points out that "economic and social development is of basic importance to the fullest attainment of health for all and to the reduction of the gap between the health status of the developing and developed countries. The promotion and protection

of the health of the people is essential to sustained economic and social development and contributes to a better quality of life and world peace.”

The Declaration emphasizes the governments' responsibility „for the health of their people which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures. A main social target of governments, international organizations and the whole world community in the coming decades should be the attainment by all peoples of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life. *Primary health care* is the key to attaining this target as part of development in the spirit of social justice”. – ”All governments should formulate national policies, strategies and plans of action to launch and sustain primary health care as part of a comprehensive national health system, and in coordination with other sectors”. – ”All countries should cooperate in a spirit of partnership and service. . .” – ”An acceptable level of health for all the people of the world by the year 2000 can be attained through a fuller and better use of the world's resources. . .”

It is clear that growth and development data, first of all growth standards, are essential tools in hands of the primary health care, and they are indispensable in pediatric practice before and after birth and can be used as a positive indicator of outcome of pregnancy and of child health. In other words, data on growth and development can be considered ”positive” and sensitive indicators specific to maternal and child health, and some relevant data can be monitored on the basis of simple measurements. Let be enough this time to mention the problems of fetal growth and birth weight, those of low birth weight, its etiology, preventions, and social implications, or in general, the childhood growth and development, including puberty. Today it is a proved statement that growth is the best indicator of nutritional status, i.e. it is more reliable than laboratory or clinical signs. But in general, we can state that children's growth process monitors also the public health status, and further also the biological value of the population.

We have many findings connected with remarkable effects as of the genetic endowments as well as of the environmental factors influencing growth and development process. We have many data on the most critical period of growth and development process, on the puberty. We know a lot about secular trend which also has important consequences for physical and mental health in childhood.

We can be sure that all these data are necessary for a well-organized primary health care system. In recent years, health workers (first of all social pediatricians) and scientists (first of all human biologists) have give more attention to systematizing the collection, the interpretation, and dissemination of data on growth and development, but much remained to be done in this field. We believe and profess that every child has his/her inalienable right to grow up healthy, and to realize his/her genetically given growth pattern wholly and completely. Consequently, we must take every opportunity to do something for the unceasing improve the environmental factors influencing growth and development of children. The youth of the early 2000s will born in the next years. We have a great responsibility for the children and youth of the next decades, for their better future. We must not forget: children grow up only once!

We are convinced that we worked in a good case as we intended to look over growth standards or reference data, and all possible findings near and far connected with growth process of children, since all these are valuable data also for the primary health care service. In this spirit we hope that our Symposium will be a useful contribution to the ambition of ”Health for all by 2000!”.

I wish all the best to all of you, I wish a successful Symposium!

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