

Making a Positive Difference

Newsletter Winter 2006



Mali

In Mali low blood glucose rarely occurs in diabetics - most cannot afford insulin, even after they have been diagnosed. However, hypoglycaemia is common in seriously ill, young children with diseases such as severe malaria or severe malnutrition. Yet many hospitals have no way of diagnosing hypoglycaemia as they lack the equipment to test for blood glucose. However, with the help of the 'Making a Positive Difference' scheme supplies of blood testing strips are being sent out to hospitals and clinics throughout the country.

Sikasso hospital has been one of the hospitals to benefit from the scheme.

Sikasso Hospital is in the South-East of Mali, a large country in West Africa. During the malaria season (July - November), up to 200 children arrive at the



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paediatric department every month with severe malaria - some are unconscious, others convulsing. Even after arriving at hospital the death rate used to be high - one in five children did not survive.

A team from the Swiss charity "Antenna Technologies" (www.antenna.ch), in partnership with the Malian Ministry of Health and Department for Traditional Medicine, has been working to improve the situation. One key element of their programme was to introduce blood glucose testing in all children who arrive unconscious or convulsing. Those who have a low blood sugar level can then be treated immediately - either with a glucose drip or with a spoonful of sugar under the tongue. A research study is underway to compare these two types of treatments. It is too early to give final results, but in many cases the sugar seems to work well. This is very exciting, because glucose drips are expensive and finding a vein in a young child can be very difficult and may waste precious minutes before treatment can be given. This treatment was pioneered by Dr Hubert Barennes at the Centre Muraz in Burkina Faso, and recently published in the journal "Paediatrics".

Since the programme started in July 2006, the mortality rate in Sikasso's paediatric ward has fallen from the normal levels of 15-20% down to 6-8%. This equates to over 20 lives saved every month thanks to the test strips donated by the 'Making a Positive Difference' scheme.

Even the nurses and doctors have been surprised that some seriously ill children, whom they expected to die, have survived.

"I remember one little boy, flat on his back with his eyelids half closed, not responding to anything. He seemed almost dead. But a quick fingerprick test revealed that his blood sugar was extremely low. We corrected this as fast as we could and a few hours later he was much better. We had to continue checking the blood glucose regularly while he was in hospital, as he was not eating much and it could (and did) fall again. After a few days he went home



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cured. Thanks to the blood glucose measurement and the treatment, we had saved him from the very clutches of death.”

We would like to thank Bayer Diabetes Care and members of the Making a Positive Difference scheme for their contribution to this very important work. Without a doubt, the glucose test strips have played an important part in the success of the project. It is important that they remain available to the hospital on a long-term basis so that the success can continue after we have left.

Mozambique

Since the start of the 'Making a Positive Difference' programme nearly three years ago, a great deal of progress has been made.

The hospital conditions in Biera have been improved with running water now available on every floor. All patients admitted to the hospital are regularly checked for diabetes thus ensuring that the correct treatment is given. Patients with diabetes are now given test strips to control their condition. Medical staff have also been trained to support and help patients with diabetes to improve their control.

The work in Biera has impressed the National Medical Authorities in Mozambique so much that they are now looking at the problem of diabetes on a wider scale and work has started to assess the scale of the problem countrywide. At this stage it is estimated that at least six clinics are needed as soon as possible. The research necessary to identify the needs of some of the more isolated communities raises many difficulties, not the least of which is transport. Some of the medical team are making visits by motor bike as most of the local roads are unsuitable for cars. One of the immediate priorities is to supply enough blood glucose testing equipment. The test strips provided by the 'Making a Positive Difference' scheme will prove vital but it may not be possible to meet all the demands of the new clinics from our scheme so the priority for testing will be children and pregnant women. Please help us to



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support testing for all patients by collecting your pack tops and encouraging other people with diabetes to call and enrol in the scheme.

Ukraine

In order to supply strips to the Ukraine we are working with a charity called 'The Forsaken Children of the Ukraine' which operates from Lincolnshire. Each year Susan and Stewart Bellamy drive trucks full of medical supplies from the UK to the Ukraine. This was how the first test strips were delivered. However, a means of sending regular supplies has now been developed and to date, 7,500 strips have been shipped.

Stewart Bellamy is working with the local doctors to try to decide how best to go forward and enlarge the programme. There is no background of good diabetes control in the area but a programme based on our strips should be in place in early 2007. Of course, there is an enormous need for any strips in a region where one man has to walk over six miles each way to his nearest clinic for his blood glucose test. However, with the help of our donated strips people with diabetes will, for the first time, be able to carry out their tests and control their blood glucose levels at home.

If you would like further information about the 'Making a Positive Difference' programme or if you know anybody with diabetes who would like to use a Bayer meter and enrol in our programme to help Diabetes in the Third World, please ask them to call 01473 219 220 and talk to Joan or Steve

Thank you for your continued support of Making a Positive Difference.



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