



International Pediatric Association

IPA Statement on “Healthy Adolescents for Healthy World”

63rd World Health Assembly May 17-21st 2010

Agenda Item 11.9 “Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases:
implementation of the global strategy”

Dr. Chok-wan CHAN

President, International Pediatric Association (IPA)

Background

- Adolescents represent a fifth of the world's population.
- Many adolescents are healthy, but a significant proportion of them face a range of problems which have implications for their health now and in the future, for this generation and the next.
- There are sound public health, economic and human rights reasons for investing in the health of adolescents.
- The Millennium Development Goals notably reducing the spread of HIV and reducing maternal and child mortality, cannot be achieved without addressing the health and development of adolescents.
- Similarly, addressing the needs of adolescents is central to tackling other priority public health problems such as obesity; those resulting from tobacco, alcohol and other substance use; those resulting from injuries and violence and those relating to mental health.
- There is growing recognition that adolescents need to be high on the public health agenda, and consensus on what needs to be done to contribute to the health of adolescents.
- National public health programmes need to be reoriented to understand and respond meaningfully to the needs and problems of adolescents.

Preventing health problems:

Behaviours such as too-early unprotected sexual activity, the use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs, and inadequate physical activity can lead to health problems. A range of risk factors can contribute to this. All adolescents need to know and understand about health, illness and injury, and about which behaviours which can help them stay healthy and which ones can lead to health problems. If and when health problems arise, adolescents need effective and sensitive care. The clinical content of care for an adolescent who contracts most illnesses is no different from that given to a child or adult. However, when dealing with potentially sensitive conditions (such as depression or STIs) there are other important issues that need to be addressed (e.g. access to HIV testing without parental consent). Further, in order for adolescents to be able and feel willing to use available health services, actions are needed to make health facilities adolescent friendly.

Role of Pediatricians

Pediatricians have a great role in preventing these adult conditions by screening and treating them during childhood and adolescence. If one wishes to improve the health of current and future adults in the world, we need to start with our children and youth. The health of future generations is dependent on the health of today's children as well as adolescents and the ability of health care providers to immunize youth against diseases that adults will otherwise prematurely develop.

The IPA recommends the following measures for adolescent care by pediatricians in the world:

- 1) **Training** Pediatricians to effectively and passionately care for the youth of the world.
- 2) **Screening and preventive care.**
- 3) **Counselling for responsible sexual behaviour**
- 4) **Preventing substance abuse**
- 5) **Immunisation**

Conclusion

Adolescence is a period of major changes and is a critical period for health promotion. Pediatricians should play a major role in helping youth achieve a healthier adolescence and adulthood so as to achieve our goal of "healthy adolescents for healthy world"!