

Difficulties and possible solutions in establishing a paediatric cardiac program in a developing country

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Background:

Establishment of pediatric cardiac services in developing countries is a major challenge. Once established, it is even bigger a challenge to cater for the needs of very large populations. In Pakistan with population of >200 millions, over 15000 babies require some form of heart surgery or intervention each year. The challenges include paucity of centers and personnel, limited resources, overcrowding, illiteracy, and infection control.

Objectives:

To analyze difficulties and propose solutions, in establishing a pediatric cardiac program.

Methods:

The Children's Hospital Lahore is a 1100-bedded public sector multidisciplinary hospital, with all the support facilities. We established a congenital cardiac program where neonatal interventions and open-heart surgeries are being performed at all ages.

Results:

Pediatric cardiac program started in 1999. The major problems faced include recruitment of trained staff and equipment and lack of resources for ongoing financial needs. So far we have performed surgery on >6000 children, with an overall mortality of 7% in the year 2015. The cost for an open-heart surgery is about US \$2000 to \$4000 and for a closed heart surgery is US \$1500 to \$2000. This is still too much for a poor patient and support by the government and philanthropic organizations ensures no patient is denied treatment for lack of funds. The current waiting list for routine open heart surgery is over 5 years. The interventional program was developed with the help of international experts visiting the unit on regular basis. There is no waiting time for the interventions.

Conclusions:

Despite improved infrastructure and skills, the logistics, affordability, staffing, late presentation, nutritional status, infection, and unfavorable economics continue to negatively influence the overall results. Continued determination and governmental as well as philanthropic support, is key to the establishment of pediatric cardiac program.