

UNIVERSAL NEONATAL HEARING SCREENING IN ALBANIA, 2009-2012.

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Abstract

Universal neonatal hearing screening Project started in Albania for the first time in January 2009. It was made possible by the support of Magis, an Italian NGO, as a grant of Italian government to the Albanian health system.

The incidence of permanent congenital hearing impairment (PCHI) is the highest among all the congenital diseases well known worldwide. It ranges from 1-3 hearing impaired children for 1000 births per year. This prevalence increases if we take into account the progressive and acquired hearing losses that continue to rise until the age of 9 years old.

The early diagnosis of PCHI is essential in preventing the irreversible consequences in the speech development of the children born with this handicap.

The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of PCHI in Albania.

Background

Early interruption of the sensor stimuli in the auditory system is followed by morphological and functional damage of the neurons. This damage can be prevented only by early stimulation of the auditory system within a sensitive period. **Universal neonatal hearing screening Project** started in Albania for the first time in January 2009. It was made possible by the support of Magis, an Italian NGO, as a grant of Italian government to the Albanian health system.

The incidence of permanent congenital hearing impairment (PCHI) is the highest among all the congenital diseases well known worldwide. It ranges from 1-3 hearing impaired children for 1000 births per year [1-5]. This prevalence increases if we take into account the progressive and acquired hearing losses that continue to raise until the age of 9 years old [6].

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Recent technological advances have made feasible universal newborn hearing screening and therefore early detection of permanent childhood hearing impairment. Over the past three years, new information has been published on whether early intervention is beneficial, the possibility of harm arising from newborn screening, and its cost. Dramatic progress has been made in the large scale implementation of universal screening in many parts of the western world.

Methods

The efficacy of a screening program depends on a well -organised structure which includes the public administration, health and educational centers taking into account the cost and profit ratio.[4,5]

The screening should cover the whole population of newborns, because is obvious for everyone who works in this field that selective screening, misses almost half of the babies born with hearing impairment. Half of the children born with any degree of hearing impairment don't fall to any risk group. [3,4]

For the first time in Albania a UNHS was implemented as a three year project, starting from January 2009 until December 2012. The screening covered the three main cities of Albania; **Tirana, Shkodra and Fier**. The total birth rate in Albania is