The Need For Universal Neonatal Screening For Congenital Hypothyroidism In India

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My opinion

Thyroid hormone plays a critical role in the development and maturation of the fetal brain. Deficient production of thyroid hormone or a defect in thyroid hormone receptor activity can lead to hypothyroidism. Congenital hypothyroidism (CH) is one of the most common preventable causes of mental retardation in children. The incidence of CH in India is estimated to be 2.1 per 1000 live births which is at least eight times higher than what is reported in western literature. Universal neonatal screening has been acknowledged as the most effective method to prevent the severe developmental and physical morbidities associated with congenital hypothyroidism (CH). However, despite proven benefits, efforts to implement it in India are still in its infancy. Congenital hypothyroidism features manifest minimally at birth making it difficult to pick up cases on the basis of clinical features alone. Clinical diagnosis is made in only 10% children in the first month of life and 30% in the first 3 months. Hence there is a high risk of delayed diagnosis exposing the child to various degrees of developmental delay.

Conclusion

In view of the high incidence, apparently asymptomatic nature, propensity to cause neurodevelopmental delay and residual impairment even with treatment, early detection and treatment of CH would be the most cost effective method to confront this problem. Despite the crushing evidence of high incidence of CH, India continues to await a plausible universal screening program. It is high time we start routine neonatal screening for CH to tackle this preventable cause of mental retardation.

Reference(s)

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