

Contributions to neonatal care of the Ibero-American Society of Neonatology

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Dear Editor:

We have carefully read the article about healthcare-associated infections, which are frequent in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU)¹. This makes us reflect on how neonatal teaching, training and outcomes have been widely uneven in Spanish-speaking countries² with poor and variable indicators. The figures indicate that 3100 newborn children (NB) need care in Neonatal Intensive Care Units daily in Latin America; 15 NB die every hour and 60 % of deaths occur in the first 28 days of postnatal age².

Aware of these problems, the Ibero-American Society of Neonatology (SIBEN) was founded in 2004. SIBEN is an international, non-profit, educational and academic organization founded by a group of pediatricians, neonatologists, nurses and interdisciplinary professionals and includes parents. Its legal status is registered in the United States.

The society was created with the purpose of contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of newborn children and their families in Ibero-America, promoting continuing education with a scientific and humane foundation and to support and implement educational programs for the constant advancement of the quality of neonatal care, developing guidelines for clinical practice, as well as disseminating knowledge, promoting collaborative research and developing an Ibero-American network of neonatal centers².

SIBEN has established original and participatory learning initiatives to reduce the gap between knowledge and care

received by many NB and their families. Doing more of the same is unjustified! For this reason, SIBEN provides educational incentives with awards, scholarships and grants to nursing staff and residents.

The learning objectives have been met through different modalities, virtual and in-person. In 2021, these strategies reached more than 7000 neonatal health professionals.

Regarding the implementation of continuous improvement in the quality of neonatal care, SIBEN has worked in different units, regions and countries, implementing advanced processes in the field, such as the one conducted with the National Health Service of the Dominican Republic³. This implementation of strategies and improvement actions in the country's main neonatal units succeeded in reducing neonatal mortality from 17 % to 12.1 %³ after two years of a multidimensional field program.

SIBEN has published more than 30 articles in peer-reviewed journals and several books. In addition to the annual International Congresses, local activities are developed through the "Neonatal Dialogues", an innovative face-to-face activity with interaction among teachers since 2014. Nursing staff participation has been key to the achievements. SIBEN keeps working to ensure that "one newborn at a time" gets good care and quality of life.

Its philosophy sets a precise course in promoting, stimulating, improving, and facilitating professional development of all neonatal related staff. It also reduces the gap and disparity that exists between knowledge and daily clinical practice, with openness and diversity to "do well by doing good"²⁻⁴.

At present, SIBEN is integrated by professionals who collaborate on voluntary basis, including a management team (general, operations, and scientific directors), an advisory body, and eleven councils with their corresponding chapters, as well as part-time administrative support. More than 85 % of these goes directly to its mission, with minimal administrative costs, as it has no assets.

It also has several interdisciplinary councils within its organization and more than 1000 active members in Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Participatory consensus conferences were developed to promote collaboration and unifying diagnostic and therapeutic criteria as part of the objectives in the dissemination of clinical assistance guidelines. This project began as "SIBEN Clinical Consensus" in 2007. It has an established methodology and the resulting product is a document with recommendations adapted to clinical practice. Some of them are published and available with open access.

As part of the purposes of its creation, the SIBEN network provides objective information on the magnitude of neonatal problems through the implementation of a voluntary, systematized, and confidential registry of newborns in the neonatal units of Latin America. Up to date, a total of 21 500 NB have been registered, of whom 13 500 are preterm (2500 weighing less than 1000 g and 4600 weighing between 1001 and 1500 g), and 8000 are at-term. In 2021, 42 neonatal units participated in the registry of underweight NB, of whom 2505 were less than 33 weeks old, and 3541 were older than 33. These data make it possible to identify differences between the participating units and to design strategies to collaborate in the processes of continuous improvement of the quality of neonatal care. In addition, it allows studies to establish situational diagnoses of specific pathologies.

Since SIBEN's creation, many of the proposed objectives have been met and adapted to the emerging reality in the region, maintaining presence and collaboration even during the pandemic years.

Its role during the COVID-19 pandemic was actively providing support for neonatal healthcare personnel and recognition of their efforts in situations of crisis and uncertainty, such as those that challenged the world. Since the pandemic began, SIBEN has disseminated updates on perinatal COVID-19 and issued a joint statement with the NeNe Foundation in Spain⁴.

SIBEN has fulfilled its founding mission for 18 years after its inception. It is aware that the road goes on. There are still many challenges; however, it is a work of heart to improve the health of newborn children.

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