

## The focus is on malaria

At the time of writing, World Malaria Day (25 April) was coming up. It is described by the website for the Rollback Malaria Campaign<sup>1</sup> as '... a day of unified commemoration of the global effort to provide effective control of malaria around the world', and the campaign further states that 'The international malaria community has merely two years to meet the 2010 targets of delivering effective and affordable protection and treatment to all people at risk of malaria, as called for by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon.' The website has a clock that is counting down to 2010, and reports that each 30 seconds a child dies from malaria!

This issue of *SAJCH* starts with a contribution to our 'Hot Topics' section by John Frea, who calls for 'no grounds for complacency' in spite of the relatively low malaria disease burden in South Africa. He gives a comprehensive summary of achievements to date, including new drugs and vector control, but also highlights challenges. The increase in the number of cases is not surprising because of malaria prevalence in neighbouring countries! The study by Chiabi *et al.* is really an audit of current practice, which found significant gaps in prevention and initial treatment of severe malaria in children before they were admitted to a hospital in Cameroon. The excellent outcome, with only 2 deaths among the 307 severe cases, was due to appropriate treatment adjustments. The World Health Organization proposed a method that can be used to identify patients with severe malaria. However, Imananagha *et al.* demonstrate that severe malaria is not a heterogeneous condition; they identify features that may be helpful and go on to propose a clinical grading system. Such a system could result in an improved level of care and better outcome in the most severe cases, but requires validation.

We have included two interesting articles on aspects of the breastfeeding spectrum. In Nigeria Uchendu and colleagues looked at factors associated with exclusive breastfeeding and found that although the majority of respondents (90%) had adequate knowledge of its benefits, only a fifth put it into practice. Among the determinants of poor uptake were a low level of education, large family size and family opposition, especially from grandmothers! The other is a South African study conducted by Matji *et al.*, who compared the postnatal feeding practices of HIV-infected and uninfected mothers with their prenatal intentions. A quarter of HIV-positive mothers who intended to formula feed prenatally changed their mind and breastfed, while 50% of women planning to breastfeed switched to formula feeds. Mothers who did not adhere to their original intention to formula feed were significantly younger, and more likely to share their home with people other than their partner. Although exclusive breastfeeding is beneficial in most situations, the increased risk of mother-to-child transmission in HIV disease makes it undesirable. Perhaps a study looking at the benefit of encouraging available older female relatives

to accompany pregnant women (especially very young ones) to antenatal care clinics would be useful!

This issue also includes a spread of case reports from various child health disciplines, including cases of  $\beta$ -thalassaemia and subdural haemorrhage and a series of cases showing various manifestations of HIV vasculopathy.

Finally, April 2009 is important for another reason. The Confederation of Meningitis Organizations (CoMO)<sup>2</sup> has announced that its member organisations in nearly 20 countries are uniting to mark 25 April 2009 as the first-ever World Meningitis Day, with the goal of raising public awareness of the disease and promoting vaccination. Rwanda has become leader of the pack by becoming the first developing country to include the pneumococcal vaccine in their National Immunisation Programme. It is hoped that other countries will be challenged to do the same.

Enjoy this issue of *SAJCH*, and as always please feel free to write, comment on articles and suggest improvements. (A reminder that the journal website is [www.sajch.org.za](http://www.sajch.org.za) – the full content of all previous issues is available there. For CPD, go to [www.cpdonline.org.za](http://www.cpdonline.org.za).)

We look forward to *SAJCH* claiming its rightful place as a leading journal in Africa and the world – we need your help!



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Editor

1. [www.rollbackmalaria.org](http://www.rollbackmalaria.org) (accessed March 2009).
2. [www.comonline.org](http://www.comonline.org) (accessed March 2009).

**A warm African congratulations to Rwanda for becoming the first developing country to include the pneumococcal vaccine in their National Immunisation Programme. Well done to Dr Richard Sezibera, Rwanda's Minister of Health, and his government!**