

Doctors emphasize on prevention of blindness in newborns

A small baby girl from Raigunj, WB, was two months pre-term when she was born. Her weight was just about 1kg. The doctors at the District Hospital, after treating her in the Sick Newborn Care Unit (SNCU) for around 4 months, were able to save her life however unfortunately she had lost her eyesight.

Something similar happened in the case of the baby boy born in Purulia District Hospital, WB. His birth weight was 1.4kgs and he was six weeks pre-term. When ophthalmologists examined him they saw that he had not yet lost his eyesight, but his eyes had the power of -8 and -7.5.

Ministry of Health Care WB, is expanding the Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU)s and SNCUs not only in district level but also in the Mandal levels. According to specialists, advancements in the infrastructure and services in the newborn healthcare sector is giving rise to cases of blindness and weak eyesight in babies. In medical term it is known as Retinopathy of Pre-maturity (ROP). This happens when excessive dose of oxygen is supplied to pre-mature babies with low birth weight. This overdose of oxygen is affecting the normal eyesight of the babies.

Sunday (Date.....) saw the presence of eminent Neonatologists from around the country in the Newborn Care Specialists (Neonatologists) Conference held in Kolkata organized by the

West Bengal Neonatal Society. One of the most important topics of discussion was the role of Pediatric Ophthalmologists in the NICUs and SNCUs.

World renowned Senior ROP Specialist Dr. Subhadra Jalali from LVPEI, Hyderabad was one of the eminent speakers at the conference. She said, “Lack of expertise in controlling the amount of oxygen to be supplied is resulting in ROP in the newborns. Previously we saw patients from Kolkata only but now we get patients from the remote areas of Purulia, Darjeeling and Bankura. Expansion of neonatal care for the sick newborns at all levels is the reason we are getting patients from such remote areas.” She applauded the initiative of the Govt. of West Bengal for trying hard to save more lives of the newborns by expanding the neonatal care units all over the state. She advised, keeping in mind the problem of ROP in pre-term babies NICUs and SNCUs should have trained ophthalmologists.

Dr. Subhadra said hospitals in countries like Europe, America, Australia and Japan do not have legal permissibility to build NICU if they do not have pediatric ophthalmologists. According to her the same thing must be implemented in India also keeping in mind the rising cases of ROP. Head of State Child Development, Neonatologist Dr. Arun Singh informed that talks are going on to include pediatric ophthalmologists in the panel of doctors for NICUs at the state level.

The state health department agreed that the expansion of neonatal care saw the increase in the cases of ROP. For this very reason to curb the rise of ROPs, government doctors are now

being trained to handle such cases. Their instructor, Retina Specialist Dr. Abhijit Chattopadhyay said, “It is a noble initiative to expand ROP treatment but it is more important to see that such cases do not happen. For this it is very important to create an awareness program for the parents. As soon as a pre-term baby with low birth rate is of 30 days they should immediately consult a pediatric ophthalmologist.”

- Pre-term babies with low birth weight should be given 40% level oxygen**
- Excessive dose of oxygen creates a layer behind the retina. This results in Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP).**
- ROP results in weak eyesight and even blindness in babies.**
- More than 1.5L babies with risk of ROP are born every year in West Bengal alone. The numbers vary in different states.**
- Every year around 20K kids are affected by ROP in West Bengal.**