

## Editor's focus

### Knowledge of primary school teachers about asthma in Umdoni subdistrict, KwaZulu-Natal

In South Africa, it is estimated that asthma affects 20% of school children. In a study among primary school children in Durban, the prevalence of asthma was reported to be 51.6%. Govender and Gray conducted a cross-sectional survey among primary school teachers at 19 randomly selected primary schools in the Umdoni subdistrict of KwaZulu-Natal province. The main objective was to assess their level of asthma knowledge and its management. The findings showed that only 38.5% had limited knowledge of asthma and its management, and only 2.65% had trained in asthma care. In addition, 56.2% believed that an antibiotic, and 31% thought that aspirin, are used to relieve an asthma attack, respectively. Only a third knew that swimming is an acceptable and beneficial sport for children with asthma. This study highlights the fact that primary school teachers' knowledge of asthma and its management is deficient in many respects. There is an urgent need to implement asthma education programmes for them. The Department of Health's primary healthcare re-engineering agenda, which includes improvement in school health care, will be the appropriate channel through which to introduce various educational programmes for primary school teachers. This will empower them to deal with common childhood illnesses within the school environment in collaboration with the school nurses.

### Students' perspectives of their rural health placements

Naidu and Irlam conducted a qualitative study to evaluate University of Cape Town medical students' perspectives and experiences of their rural placements. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 students, and nine placement-reflective reports were reviewed. The authors analysed and coded the data for key themes using a constant-comparative grounded theory approach. From the emergent themes, the students expected to encounter poverty, limited resources, understaffing and poor service delivery, but were surprised to find fully functioning hospitals that managed comfortably despite resource constraints. Other themes showed that they had exposure to practical skills and these changed their attitudes to studies and career aspirations. They also experienced challenges during the rural placements, which included professional lapses, group discord and inability to help as much as students would have liked. As this is a qualitative study, the results are not generalisable and the findings are also subject to "reporting bias". Nevertheless, the

study provided the basis for similar studies to be carried out in all South African medical schools, where medical students undergo rural placements as part of their medical training.

### Exploration of pain in children on antiretroviral treatment

Patients with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) on antiretroviral therapy (ART) may experience pain due to the effects of the virus, opportunistic infections and ART. Pain is a common symptom in adults who are on ART. There is paucity of local studies on the prevalence of pain in paediatric patients with HIV on ART. The authors of the study sought to explore the experience and the prevalence of pain in young children aged 3-13 years on ART using their caregivers as "informants" for the study. They used the Wong-Baker FACES™ Pain Rating Scale, which is a validated assessment tool that was developed for pain assessment in children over the age of three. A third of the caregivers reported that pain interfered with the daily and physical activities of the children, while 44.8% indicated that their children experienced some pain (scored > 2 on the Wong-Baker FACES™ Pain Rating Scale) at the time of the interview. Paracetamol was the most commonly used analgesic for the pain experienced by the children. The authors alluded to study limitations which included the convenience sample used for the study, the short duration of the study and that it was the caregivers who assessed the pain using a validated tool that should have been used by the children to report pain. As this was an exploratory study, it will be important for the same authors to repeat the study using the children as informants to obtain more accurate information on the prevalence of pain in paediatric HIV patients on ART. For now, the prevalence of pain in paediatric patients with HIV on ART is still a "guesstimate".

**Prof Gboyega A Ogunbanjo**

### References

1. Govender D, Gray A. Knowledge of primary school teachers about asthma: a cross-sectional survey in the Umdoni sub-district, KwaZulu-Natal. *S Afr Fam Pract*. 2012;54(4):347-351.
2. Naidu CS, Irlam J. Evaluating the rural health placements of the Rural Support Network at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town. *S Afr Fam Pract*. 2012;54(4):352-357.
3. Azam M, Campbell L, Ross A. Exploration of pain in children on antiretroviral treatment in a regional hospital, South Africa. *S Afr Fam Pract*. 2012;54(4):358-362.