

Press release

Protection for newborns:

New European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants established

Munich, 18. April 2008 (ps) – The figures speak for themselves: around 10 percent of all newborns come into the world prematurely, 2 percent of which are born earlier than 32 weeks of pregnancy (2 months early). These children are at particularly high-risk of later developmental disorders. In Munich, a European charitable foundation has now been established to provide support to parents of premature infants: the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI).

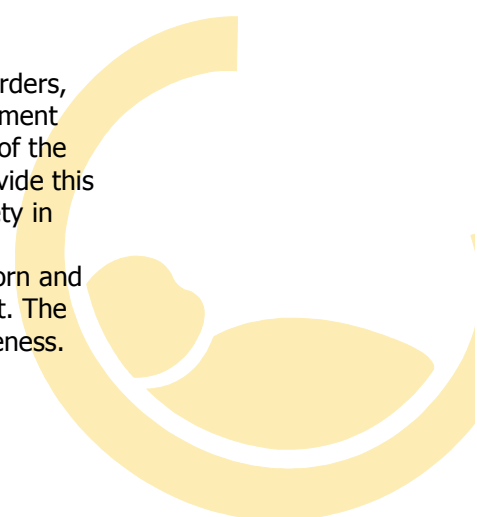
Huge challenge for parents and children

Even full term babies are vulnerable to health problems, but for premature babies the risk of illness, including long-term problems is higher. Premature babies may be more vulnerable to infection or speech development and coordination disorders. Other possible consequences include attention disorders and performance deficits into primary school age. Such problems represent a huge challenge for children and their parents, not just in physical terms, but also in psychological and financial terms. The parent study carried out by EFCNI, the European research consortium Neobrain (www.neobrain.eu), and the Medical University of Innsbruck showed that parents of an infant born before 32 weeks gestational age spend an average of one month's salary each year on treatment, medication, and childcare in the first five years of the child's life. Furthermore, they travel 2,400 km each year to doctors and hospitals.

Lack of service provision in prevention and aftercare

Thanks to the improvement of intensive medicine, infant mortality in Germany has fallen by 41 percent since 1990. Nevertheless, there is a lack of service provisions in preliminary care and aftercare. Women going through a high-risk pregnancy require special and timely attention and need clinics that specialise in the care of newborn and premature infants. Statutory payments for premature births, however, represent a financial incentive for small hospitals, where infants with a body weight of less than 1,500 g statistically have lower chances of surviving. In order to guarantee high quality treatment, clinics should be required to demonstrate an annual minimum volume of these risk groups and proof of their expertise in dealing with them. Policy makers have also been approached about this.

Furthermore, aftercare for such problems as neurological disorders (visual disorders, feeding problems and dyspraxia) is still not receiving sufficient attention. Treatment that promotes development can have a positive influence on the development of the brain, even in the first weeks of life. However, a hospital is not required to provide this care. Researchers and neonatal specialists find themselves dealing with a society in which a lobby for newborn infants has not yet been created. In comparison to "epidemics" such as diabetes or heart disease in adults, the problems of newborn and premature infants make little impact on either state or private research support. The care of newborn and premature infants also suffers from a lack of public awareness.



Targeted lobbying for newborn children

For this reason, the largest group of child patients needs a targeted lobby. EFCNI was formed by parent groups, scientists and the founders as the first Europe-wide network for affected parents and children. It provides information and platforms for exchange and support. For the first time on a European level, EFCNI is also bringing together specialists in various disciplines involved in improving the care of newborn infants and preventing premature births. This also includes support for experimental and clinical research and the development of quality standards, as well as training opportunities for specialised medical staff. EFCNI promotes research on the improvement of newborns' and premature infants' long-term health.

Building a Europe-wide network

The purpose of the foundation is to work towards improving the care of newborn infants and the prevention of premature births across Europe. Support for affected parents throughout Europe is the top priority. EFCNI represents their interests and enforces political demands in the European Union (EU). It is also building a Europe-wide medical network. Awareness of the issues must be raised among the public and the state institutions of the EU. The foundation's work is supported and sponsored by Abbott. Abbott is a leading pharmaceutical company that markets a monoclonal antibody in the neonatal field for protection against severe respiratory infections caused by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), to which children born prematurely are particularly vulnerable. Further funds come from the revenues of the foundation assets and contribution, such as donations and sponsoring. The foundation has also received support from the European research consortium, Neobrain.

The European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI) is both a network for everyone involved with preterm and sick newborns, and a forum for scientists. Its declared objective is to bring about long-term improvement in the care situation for these infants, helping to ensure that Europe's largest group of child patients receive the attention and the lobby they deserve. More information at www.efcni.org.

For further press information please turn to:

Jutta Tempel
COMEO Public Relations
Hofmannstr. 7A, 81379 München
Tel: +49 (089) 74 888 2-20
E-mail: tempel@comeo.de
www.comeo.de

Silke Mader
Geschäftsführende Vorstandsvorsitzende
EFCNI
Würmanger 5, 85757 Karlsfeld
Tel: +49 (08131) 90 85 59
silke.mader@efcni.org
www.efcni.org

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