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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ALLERGY IN SOMALIA



I was privileged to recently accompany the charity Gift of the Givers (GOTG) on a humanitarian mission to Somalia. I was part of a medical team of 27 health professionals which comprised 3 paediatricians. Somalia is a country gripped in war and drought resulting in millions of internally displaced people. There is no central government or health authority to take care of the basic needs of society. This has had devastating consequences for the people of Somalia. The women and children of Somalia have been the main victims of the famine. We treated thousands of children in the few days that we were there.

The children that we treated were severely growth stunted. We saw many children with kwashiorkor, marasmus, TB, malaria, acute and chronic diarrhoeal diseases, measles and other infectious diseases. Most of the children that we saw lived in appalling conditions and had no access to water, sanitation and basic health care. None of the children was immunised. Some of the children had never consulted a doctor before. It was also very heartbreaking to see some children with treatable diseases, but lack of resources prevented us offering them any treatment. These included children with congenital hydrocephalous, congenital heart disease (cyanotic and acyanotic), osteosarcoma, retinoblastoma, TB and malaria.

What was remarkable however was that in the camps where GOTG provides meals, we found very few sick people. This was only after 1 month of starting the feeding scheme. GOTG feeds 30 000 people on a daily basis and the numbers are growing.

A striking observation was that we saw very few children with allergic diseases. My colleagues and I saw only two children with allergic rhinitis and conjunctivitis. We did not see any children with asthma, atopic eczema or food allergy. There is now a lot of debate about the validity of the hygiene hypothesis. Perhaps the hygiene hypothesis does apply to Somali children.

Back home we are busy preparing for our annual congress. This will be a joint meeting with the PMG. It promises to be an exciting event with many local and international experts in allergy, immunodeficiency and paediatrics. We look forward to hosting you.

On a sad note we would like to express our condolences to the family of Ed Findley who passed away in September this year. Ed was a true friend of ALLSA. He supported the society and individuals in the society in many different ways. He was instrumental in establishing the UCB Allergy Research Award. Ed will be missed by the allergy fraternity and his contribution will not be forgotten. Our thoughts are with his family. May his soul rest in peace.

Ahmed Manjra

Chairman