Nutrition In Children With Neuromotor Disabilities: Still A Problem In An Italian Series

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Neuromotor disabilities share exclusive and often quite neglected nutritional problems. Our study aims to delineate the frequency of malnutrition in a series of non-hospitalized, neurologically impaired children.

Thirty children (21 M, 9 F; age 2 - 15 years) followed-up as outpatients by pediatric neurologists for cerebral palsy (n = 15), epileptic encephalopathy (n = 6), severe psychomotor developmental delay (n= 5), and genetic syndromes (n = 4). Nutritional status was assessed by anthropometric parameters [weight, estimated height by specific body segments measurement, according to Stevenson criteria, BMI, Plicometry], blood count, serum levels of iron, albumin, transferrin, Ca, P. Feeding difficulties and a 3 days food diary were recorded.

Despite massive caregivers commitment [about 90% of patients required constant assistance during meals, usually > 30 minutes/meal (mean 45 minutes)], most patients had an insufficient daily caloric intake with slightly unbalanced composition. Approximately from one third to an half of them was at high risk of malnutrition according to feeding difficulties (44%), reduced albumin and transferrin levels, or < 5th percentile weight (44%), and BMI (33%) and < 10th percentile triceps skinfold thickness (37%). Malnutrition was less severe in 4 patients who had got a PEG access.

The results of the present study suggest that during the specialized follow-up of neurologically impaired children, nutritional issues are still rather neglected and need therefore more emphasis in the daily care.

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