

From the Editor's Desk

This issue of MGMJMS carries an interesting and informative review article about carrier screening for prevention of genetic disorders. India, with its huge population of 1.3 billion people, has high prevalence of genetic disorders. It has been estimated that each year about one million babies are born in our country with various genetic diseases like congenital malformation, glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency, amino acid metabolic disorders, Down syndrome, thalassemia sickle cell disease, neural tube defects and muscular dystrophies. In terms of numbers, the burden is huge. Prevalence of these disorders can be reduced to a large extent if carrier screening of prospective parents is carried out. If one or both of them test positive for the mutations in genes which are responsible for transmission of a particular genetic disorder, they can be counseled before conception. Prevention of birth of a baby with a serious genetic disorder not only relieves the burden of the affected family but also prevents further transmission of the mutation in future generations. Carrier screening should be mandatory for blood-linked families having a member who is clinically affected. For others, without history of genetic diseases, carrier screening can be optional. To meet this huge challenge, we need to develop proper infrastructure in the country. Medical genetics departments should be opened in all medical colleges. Physicians and other staff should be trained in genetic counseling. Adequate number of genetic laboratories with research centers must be established. To begin with, high priority diseases which affect our community should be identified and carrier screening for those diseases integrated into existing health care system. Later on, this program can be expanded. Most importantly, as the author of the article has stressed, public needs to be made aware of benefits of carrier screening so that their unfounded fears of getting socially stigmatized if found positive for gene mutations, are alleviated. Initial investment in this national program will be huge, but final outcome in terms of reduction in number of babies born with genetic diseases, will be rewarding and that will have a big positive impact on the overall community health. Developed countries have established genetic testing facilities for screening carriers on large scales and many genetic disorders which were common to particular ethnic communities have been nearly eliminated.

We are pleased to present the current issue of MGMJMS to our esteemed readers. Once again a big Thank you to our valued contributors.

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