DETERMINANTS OF MISSED OPPORTUNITY IN DIAGNOSING CHILDREN CONGENITALLY INFECTED WITH TRYPANOSOMA CRUZI IN ARGENTINA: KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS.

Sergio Sosa-Estani, MD, PhD *; Aklecia McVoy ***; Maria L. Cafferata, MD ****; José Belizan, MD, PhD *; Fernando Althabe, MD, MSc *.

*Instituto de Efectividad Clínica, **Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) Buenos Aires, Argentina; ***Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, New Orleans, Louisiana; ****Clinical and Epidemiological Research Unit, Montevideo, Uruguay.

BACKGROUND: Congenital infection of Trypanosoma cruzi is the third highest mode of transmission of Chagas disease. In Argentina, an estimated 62% of congenitally infected children are not diagnosed and treated. This study is the first stage of a larger study exploring possible determinants of missed or delayed diagnosis in congenitally infected children. We assessed the knowledge and practices of healthcare workers concerning congenital transmission.  

METHODS: Auto-administrated questionnaires were distributed throughout a public maternity hospital in northern Argentina to obstetricians, neonatologists, pediatricians, midwives, and biochemists and subsequently analyzed.  

RESULTS: Among 86 healthcare workers, 54.1% never attended a training course in congenital transmission of T. cruzi. More than 60% of healthcare workers did not know that the diagnosis of an infected woman could occur anytime during pregnancy, and over a quarter (26.3%) of healthcare workers were unaware using two serological techniques is the most practical method to confirm diagnosis in pregnant women. Of the responses to the question regarding diagnostic techniques used on a newborn (birth to one-month old), 47.3% were either incorrect or ‘do not know’. Of the responses to the question regarding diagnostic techniques used to confirm infection in a 5 month-old with a reactive hemagglutination inhibition assay, 79.5% were either incorrect or ‘do not know’.  

CONCLUSION: This study revealed a lack of knowledge among healthcare professionals in diagnosing children congenitally infected with T. cruzi. Potential avenues of education are needed to increase knowledge and improve practices among healthcare workers.