infant health from which management strategies can be evaluated and planned.

M H Bellman
University College Hospital, London WC1E 6AU

Professor Morley comments:
I am delighted that Dr Bellman has raised the need to evaluate the methods developed in Bogota. He perhaps does not appreciate, however, that at the present time less than 1% of low birthweight (LBW) babies in developing countries have access to any form of intensive neonatal care facilities. It is hardly an 'either 'or' situation. Even in the United Kingdom, I understand that there is difficulty in providing enough facilities.

My own experience in this field of LBW care arose from working with a nursing sister, Margaret Woodland, in the village of Imesi, Nigeria in the late 50s. Keeping the child in skin contact with the mother, she achieved survival results in LBW infants similar to those in Birmingham in the early 50s.

On visits to many countries I have frequently seen LBW babies placed in expensive incubators in areas where there was no oxygen, irregular electricity, and few maintenance facilities, let alone nurses adequately trained in their care.

The median expenditure on health care in developing countries in 1980, was US $4 compared with a median of US $220 for industrialised countries. In these less fortunate countries, there are two or three times more births and 10 to 30% of all births may be considered LBW. In the foreseeable future, only a minute proportion of these can (or should) receive costly intensive neonatal care. For the remainder, mother-oriented methods such as those developed by the team in Bogota are likely to have many advantages.

References


Sir,
In his excellent paper, Dr Bellman states that the lives of half a million children were saved in 1984 by oral rehydration after diarrhoea, in spite of the fact that only 15% of the world's children had access to this treatment. May I add to Dr Morley's comments.

Diarrhoea kills 6 million children each year. The main source of infection being contaminated water supplies. There is a shortage of water in developing countries so that it tends to be used over and over again until it ends up thoroughly dirty and an ideal medium for pathogens and disease.

It seems to me that this is a case where prevention is much better than cure. There is an urgent need for governments to ensure the provision of clean and adequate supplies of water together with the safer disposal of all waste products. Until this is done, many more millions of children will die in the Third World.

Reference