5.1 Challenges to the Provision of a Pediatric Pathology Service in a Resource-Limited Setting

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Provision of Pediatric Pathology services is a challenge in resource-limiting settings. Funding limitation is a major contributor to inadequate access to gold-standard pathology laboratory services in general and in particular to ancillary pathological testing and pediatric pathology expertise. As disease classification, prognostication and treatment protocols have been moving towards dependency on identification of molecular and other genetic markers, including in the pediatric population, this is of growing concern.

The English-speaking Caribbean exemplifies the challenges of resource limitation and how this directly and indirectly affects the provision of service. The direct effects are more obvious: (i) pathologist staff compliments are often smaller than required for the population being served and often lack subspecialty expertise such as Pediatric Pathologists and (ii) pathology laboratories are unable to provide increasingly required state of the art ancillary pathological testing. These can result in prolonged turn-around times for reports and suboptimal diagnostic assessment which has serious implications on pediatric cancer diagnosis, management and mortality rates in Caribbean children. Indirect factors are also very important. At an infrastructural level there is often reluctance of institutions and governments to make allocations from already limited budgets to laboratory facilities, equipment and supplies required for accurate diagnosis of uncommon childhood cancers and genetic disorders. In low-income countries there can be lack of National health insurance schemes and a significant percentage of the population without personal health insurance, resulting in inability to access optimal diagnostic services, even where this can be made available locally or externally.

Finding solutions to this complex interplay of factors is challenging. Utilization of referral pathology laboratories where ancillary tests can be performed and/or pediatric pathology consultation obtained, is one solution but can be expensive. Provision of inexpensive subspecialty training and ongoing education in pediatric pathology, to general pathologists and laboratory technologists practicing in resource-limited settings can make significant contribution to improved diagnostic services.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to:

1. State the direct and indirect limitations to provision of a Pediatric Pathology Service in a Resource-Limited Setting
2. Discuss the significance of these limitations to Pediatric Pathology Service in a Resource-Limited Setting
3. Demonstrate ways in which adjustments can be made for these limitations