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50 Years Ago in *THE JOURNAL OF PEDIATRICS*

Neonatal Mortality: Making the Nonpreventable Preventable

Valdes-Dapena MA, Arey JB. The causes of neonatal mortality: an analysis of 501 autopsies on newborn infants. *J Pediatr* 1970; 77:366-75.

Valdes-Dapena and Arey showed us that the main causes of neonatal mortality are diseases secondary to prematurity and those associated with inflammatory diseases. But as medicine continues to advance, the frequency and epidemiology of diseases tend to change as well. Such is the case with neonatal mortality, which according to the World Health Organization is showing a downward trend in recent years, from 0.43% in 2008 to 0.36% in 2015, with indications that this trend will continue in the coming years.¹

Fifty years ago, the trends toward an increase in conditions associated with prematurity such as pulmonary hyaline membrane disease or intraventricular hemorrhage and a decrease in cases of fetal hypoxia and fetal trauma were already evident. However, there was no decrease in mortality secondary to inflammatory lesions compared with previous years. Although it is true that most preventable diseases, such as inflammatory lesions, are considered problems of the past, the rates of death and complications associated with prematurity remain high.

As the years pass and neonatal critical care and technologies improve, there will be an increasing number of newborns of lower gestational age and of lower birth weight. We are better prepared to deal with premature (and extremely premature) newborns, which translates into decreased mortality. Thanks to the progress and innovations in medicine, the preventable causes of mortality seem to have remained in the past. Preventing premature births seems to be more complex, but 50 years from now we might view it as something easily accomplished.

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