P4

An Infant with Delayed Speech and Motor Development Secondary to Congenital Hypothyroidism: Importance of Early Identification

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Congenital Hypothyroidism is the thyroid hormone deficiency present at birth. It can occur as an anatomic defect in the gland, an inborn error of thyroid metabolism, or iodine deficiency. If congenital hypothyroidism develops, untoward effects may be shown in various organ systems, including central nervous system. This in turn may lead to growth retardation, mental retardation, delayed motor development, hearing impairment, delayed speech and language development, and deficits in auditory processing and reading as well.

Most neonates born with Congenital Hypothyroidism tend to have normal appearance with no detectable physical signs during early infancy. Therefore, the diagnosis is delayed till a point of delayed development of motor, speech and language milestones leading to very severe outcomes. If diagnosed and intervened appropriately in the early stages (by two to three weeks), normal development of milestones can be ensured and significant long-standing effects on development can be prevented.

This case study addresses the communication profile of a 6-month old female child diagnosed with Congenital Hypothyroidism. The diagnosis of Congenital Hypothyroidism (Thyroid Agenesis) was confirmed through thyroid scan along with various other medical evaluations. Clinically, the child presented with delay in development of prelinguistic skills, motor development and reduced hearing sensitivity. Speech, language, and audiological evaluations were carried out. The caretaker was counselled and demonstration for stimulation of communication behaviours was provided. This case study emphasizes the importance of early diagnosis of developmental delay secondary to Congenital Hypothyroidism. The importance of parent empowerment regarding strategies to facilitate development of communication will be highlighted.