A sociological study of mothers' knowledge towards hydrocephalus and spina bifida in The Children Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan

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Background
In Pakistan hydrocephalus and spina bifida are becoming two of the most common birth defects but no effective organizational structure or educational program exists to create awareness about these in society. The main purpose of this research was to explore the knowledge of women regarding hydrocephalus and spina bifida both before and after birth of children affected by these conditions.

Methods
This study was carried out in paediatric neurosurgery outpatient department (OPD) in The Children Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan. 500 mothers with babies suffering from hydrocephalus and spina were selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique. Data was analysed SPSS v19.

Results
Of the 500 babies 44.5% were suffering from hydrocephalus, 28.2% spina bifida and 27.3 hydrocephalus and spina bifida. 90.6% of the mother had no awareness about any vitamins preventing birth defects. The majority did not know what medicines (including vitamins) doctors/health workers had prescribed for them, remembering only their colours. Based on tablet colours and samples we deduced that 22% were taking folic acid but 89.4% of these did not know about folic acid preventing spina bifida, 10.6% did know, but only 2.6% knew the dose of folic acid to take and only 1% knew when to stop taking folic acid. Only 9.6% of the women said they could find folic acid available in medical stores.

Conclusion
The study findings show that women attending hospital with children suffering hydrocephalus and/or spina bifida had a very low knowledge of the importance of vitamins/supplements during pregnancy. There is therefore an urgent need to intervene with a complete program to focus on women and health professional to create awareness about hydrocephalus and spina bifda and how maternal health and simple supplements can prevent severe developmental defects. International and national programs may then have a better chance of making an impact.