

VISUAL SCREENING OF CHILDREN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Visual screening of children by orthoptists has been sponsored in Western Australia as in other States, by the Lion's Save Sight Foundation.

The response has not always been good, and is possibly better in the country areas. We conducted screenings in various metropolitan areas up to November 1974 since then the Lions seem to be engaged in other Save Sight projects. Some of us have had trips to country areas, mainly by plane, covering the South as far as Esperance, the East to Meekatharra, and the northern mining areas and on to the far North, Wyndham and Kunurra.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to go on the trips have gained much greater insight into Community Welfare problems, and a healthy admiration for the welfare workers and others who try to help the people in their areas, often under the most trying conditions, day in, day out. The Health Department allows children requiring medical treatment to travel free to Perth if they live north of the 26th parallel, and others can get assistance according to circumstances.

It seems to me a pity that this is stereotyped, as there could be obvious advantages in seeing them in their own environment, and sending those who need it south for further examination and treatment. Various groups of people do go, or are sent, north but I feel that a co-ordinated approach involving, say, both an orthoptist and an ophthalmologist would be of more benefit. Children of white, particularly of British parentage, appear to suffer from divergent squints.

The aborigines appear to be the most disadvantaged. They are not accustomed to our signs and symbols, and I feel that they need a special chart. The tribal ones are the most delightful children, well disciplined, and their elders stand by. They make no fuss if they don't understand, merely becoming silently shy, with lovely liquid brown eyes, charming smiles, and clouds of flies around their eyes and runny noses. All the full bloods I tested had excellent visual acuity. I tested some in camps in the open, hanging my E chart on the nearest gum tree.

The semi-civilized ones suffered from malnutrition, and their eyesight seemed to be less of a problem than their general health.

Tests for trachoma are done by the Welfare officers as a routine now. Even though the percentage screened was not always high, often due to public apathy, I feel that the number we have "saved" from amblyopia and refractive errors was worth it; news of grateful parents filters through to me.

My main country practice involves approximately 700 miles and four country towns in four days once every three months. The contacts there, particularly if patients or parents keep in touch by phone or mail between times, can speed the treatment of amblyopia in particular, and encourages them to keep at it. Results in the end are often just as good as those of town patients.

ORTHOPTICS AND CEREBRAL PALSY

V.C. Elliot

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To quote a widely accepted definition: "Cerebral palsy is a persistent but not unchanging disorder of movement and posture appearing in the early years of life and due to a non-progressive disorder of the brain, the result of interference during its development."