

Intussusception in Trinidad

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Intussusception is the commonest cause of intestinal obstruction in childhood in Trinidad.

Review of 94 cases seen at the General Hospital, Port-of-Spain, over a 12-year period (1974–1985) indicates that there has been a very rapid increase in the incidence of intussusception in the last four years. There was a predominance in the negro child (62%) under 1 year of age (87%). The male to female ratio was 1.2 : 1.

A high misdiagnosis rate (55%) led to inappropriate treatment by General Practitioners, wrong referral to medical wards and delay in surgical intervention. This resulted in a high mortality (6.4%) and complication rate. The uncomplicated cases had a first symptom to surgery interval of 19.6 hours and a hospital stay of 4.7 days compared to 45 hours and 13 days for complicated cases. Children requiring gut resection had a greater delay in diagnosis and treatment and a higher incidence of post-operative complications.

In order to minimize morbidity and mortality from intussusception, steps must be taken to ensure earlier diagnosis and treatment. Increased awareness of the fact that intussusception can mimic the common conditions, gastroenteritis and upper respiratory infection, should increase diagnostic accuracy. More liberal use of abdominal X-ray in doubtful cases is advocated since 94% of our cases had radiological features of intestinal obstruction.