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Paediatric gastroenterology, hepatology and nutrition – balancing act between everyday and advanced medicine

From failure to thrive and overweight-related liver disease to functional stomach pain, food intolerance and chronic inflammatory bowel disease – the spectrum of gastrointestinal disorders, liver diseases and nutritional issues is every bit as complex in children as it is in adults. The topics under discussion at the 6th World Congress of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (WCPGHAN) at the Austria Center Vienna from 2-5 June reflected this, covering everything from everyday to advanced medicine.

“Paediatric gastroenterology, hepatology and nutrition is a very broad area of paediatric and adolescent medicine. We have to maintain a firm focus on the underlying situations in children’s everyday lives and keep a close eye on their development as well as the complexities of high-end medicine. Continuous improvement in diagnosis and treatment is predicated on consistent incorporation of all of these aspects in our specialist societies, which tie us all together and pave the way for partnerships that continue for many years – and worldwide, like at WCPGHAN 2021 right now with hundreds of lectures, seminars and discussions. We are obviously very pleased to be staging this congress in Vienna after more than 50 years of the European society – this time as a world congress and for only the second time in Europe,” explained Dr. Almuthe Christina Hauer, WCPGHAN 2021 Congress President and Head of the Committee on Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition at the Austrian Society of Paediatric and Adolescent Medicine.

Coeliac disease – endemic condition going undetected in 9 out of 10 sufferers

Coeliac disease is a condition characterised by an abnormally sensitive immune system, in which an intolerance to gluten leads to chronic inflammation of the mucous membrane in the small intestine. Around 1% of the population has coeliac, but nine out of ten of them are unaware that they have the condition. “The problem is that coeliac symptoms can vary so much – to the extent that the condition is also known as a ‘clinical chameleon’,” Hauer explains. Failure to diagnose and treat coeliac disease can lead to chronic gastrointestinal problems, malnutrition and growth disorders. Anaemia is sometimes an early sign of the condition. Up to 18% of a coeliac patient’s immediate relatives may also be unwittingly afflicted by the disease. Combinations of increasingly accurate lab tests make confirming a diagnosis easier, meaning that biopsies of the duodenal mucosa and subjecting patients to endoscopies is often no longer required: in poorer countries this helps reduce costs. That said, if the results of the combination of tests are inconclusive, previously established protocol is still followed.

Austrian Mutter-Kind-Pass check-ups help sniff out diseases

As a point of principle, age-appropriate food is essential for a child's healthy development. Which is why the Mutter-Kind-Pass check-ups monitor babies from the outset to see if they are thriving. Failure to thrive, i.e. delays in weight gain and growth, can often be symptomatic of other, more complicated, underlying conditions. Recent data reveals that up to 40% of all children hospitalised in Western Europe have been diagnosed with "failure to thrive", which could in itself be an indication of a gastrointestinal or hepatic disease (in other words a condition affecting the gastrointestinal tract, liver and bile ducts or gall bladder). "The Mutter-Kind-Pass check-ups are one of the most important diagnostic instruments anywhere in the world – and a key part of everyday medical practice," Hauer added.

And finally: Covid-19 news

WCPGHAN 2021 will also put the Covid-19 pandemic at the heart of various discussions, including one of the traditional highlights of the event: the State-of-the-Art Lecture, which will be given this time by Prof. Josef Penninger and cover assorted themes including medication-based treatment approaches.

About IAKW-AG

Internationales Amtssitz- und Konferenzzentrum Wien, Aktiengesellschaft (IAKW-AG) is responsible for maintaining the Vienna International Centre (VIC) and operating the Austria Center Vienna. The Austria Center Vienna is Austria's largest conference centre, with 24 halls, 180 meeting rooms, and some 26,000 m² of exhibition space, and is one of the top players on the international conference circuit.

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