Introduction

Children with surgical illnesses in the developing countries often present late, in a setting of limited resources. The aim of this study was to describe the pattern of surgical conditions among the children who present at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital (MRRH) in Uganda, the general health status of these children, the anaesthesia they receive and the intra-operative outcome.

Methods: The anaesthesia log book in the theatre for general surgery at MRRH was used to review the data of patients aged 0-17 years old that were attended to between May 2010 to April 2012.

• The data included age, sex, diagnosis, ASA physical status, urgency of the procedure, procedure performed, anaesthesia provided and the intra-operative outcome.
• The number of children and the overall number of patients managed in the theatre were determined.

Results

• A total of 2,357 patients received anaesthesia in the period of two years, excluding obstetric and gynaecology patients. Children numbered 1,041 (44.2%).
• Among the children 663 (63.7%) were male and 378 (36.3%) female.
• Children who presented as emergency patients numbered 758 (72.8%) while 283 (27.2%) were elective.
• Children with ASA I physical status were 464 (44.6%), while 329 (31.6%) were ASA II, 227 (21.8%) ASA III, 20 (1.9%) ASA IV and 1 (0.1%) had ASA V status.
• Gastrointestinal conditions constituted 273 (26.2%) cases, of which 142 (13.6%) had gut perforation or peritonitis and 131 (12.6%) had conditions like intussusception or appendicitis.
• Children with ear, nose and throat (E.N.T) problems were 198 (19%), of which 145 (13.9%) had foreign body and 53 (5.1%) had other E.N.T problems.
• Congenital malformations registered 168 (16.1%) cases, infections 137 (13.2%), trauma 126 (12.1%), and neoplasms 70 (6.7%).
• Children who received general anaesthesia alone were 941 (90.4%) while 74 (7.1%) received combined general and regional anaesthesia and 26 (2.5%) received regional anaesthesia were.
• Outcomes in the operating theatre were such that 931 (89.4%) were graded as good, 109 (10.5%) as fair, and 1 (0.1%) as poor. The latter case died on table and was the sole ASA 5 paediatric patient.

Conclusions

• Children make up a big proportion of patients who receive surgery and anaesthesia at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital in Western Uganda.
• A big majority of the children present as emergency patients rather than elective, and a big proportion present late in contrast to what is seen in resource-rich countries.
• The leading conditions among the surgical diseases of children in Western Uganda include congenital malformations, gut perforations/peritonitis, bowel obstruction, other infections, trauma and foreign body.
• Intra-operative outcome among children at MRRH is however favourable. These results are generally similar to those from studies conducted elsewhere in the sub-Saharan region.

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