

Dear readers!

Spoštovani bralci!

Rok Orel



This special issue of our journal, *Zdravniški vestnik*, is dedicated exclusively to pediatric gastroenterology, hepatology and nutrition. Diseases and functional disorders of the gastrointestinal tract are the second most common reason why children and their parents seek medical help. Moreover, many of the gastrointestinal diseases present with different clinical course, complications and require different diagnostic and therapeutic approach in children and adolescents than in adult patients. A good example is pediatric inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). In approximately one third of patients this disease starts in childhood.¹ The incidence of pediatric IBD is growing continuously all over the world, reaching nearly $13/10^5$ in some northern European countries.² It seems that childhood IBD behaves more aggressive than the adult one. Although at diagnosis the majority of children with Crohn's disease have inflammatory phenotype, in the following few years the number of patients with complicated structuring and fistulizing phenotypes doubles.³ Therefore, childhood IBD has been chosen for the first main topic of this issue.

IBD is a result of abnormal immune response. Several other diseases, rare in the past but relatively common in last few years, such as autoimmune liver disease and eosinophilic esophagitis, seem to be the consequence of derailed immunity, too. Our knowledge on the genetic background of these diseases is rapidly increasing, and new predisposing gene loci are discovered nearly every month. However, genetic predisposition cannot explain tremendous increase

in the incidence of different immune-modulated diseases we have been facing in the last few decades. The scientific interest has turned to search for different environmental factors that may be responsible for that. The way of living and especially feeding has definitely changed substantially. Food rich in protein, saturated fat and refined sugar, and poor in vegetable, fruit and fiber, has been increasingly replacing traditional family meals in our youngsters. Do these changes represent the major triggering factor for skewing of the immune response? We can only speculate. However, food is an important issue in people's and especially children's health. We dedicated a substantial part of this supplement to nutrition.

And finally, there are intestinal microorganisms. A community of between 10^{13} to 10^{14} microorganisms with over 1000 different bacterial species inhabits our gastrointestinal tract and plays an important role in metabolism, defence against environmental pathogens, motility and immune system regulation. The complex interactions between food, intestinal microorganisms, gut epithelium and cells of innate and specific immune systems seem to play a major role in the pathogenesis of many gastrointestinal and non-gastrointestinal diseases. Thanks to the increasing knowledge about these processes, new preventive and therapeutic strategies have been developed by using health promoting microorganisms, probiotics, or special food ingredients promoting growth and activity of indigenous "good bugs", prebiotics, and their efficacy has been continuously studied for different indications. Therefore,

the third part of this issue deals with evidence-based clinical use of pro- and prebiotics.

The publication of this special pediatric gastroenterology issue would not be possible without generous willingness and help from my colleagues, many of them personal friends, from two important professional and scientific communities, European Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) and South-Eastern European Pediatric Gastroenterology (SEEPEG). We invited them to write comprehensive review articles on the subjects of their personal expertise. Although, these papers written by European most prominent researchers and opinion-leaders

represent the most valuable contribution to this volume, we also wanted to encourage our co-workers, clinical dieticians and nurses, to publish their aspects of medical care of pediatric patients with gastrointestinal diseases.

My dear readers, I hope that even those of you who are not particularly interested in pediatrics will find something interesting and exciting in our present volume. We were always thought that children should not be regarded merely as small adults. However, I want to remind you, my “adult” colleagues, that they also share many similarities with us.

prof. dr. Rok Orel, dr. med.

References

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