Online cases tap into early brain research

by Trisha Korioth
Associate Editor

All babies are born with a fixed number of brain cells. Early in life, connections among those cells are established and enhanced. If those connections are not made, brain cells wither and die.

The Academy hopes to raise awareness of early brain development by enhancing pediatricians’ knowledge and skills through a PediaLink continuing medical education (CME) module.

PediaLink is the Academy’s customized Internet-based learning system for pediatricians to manage CME activities and access quality educational resources through one online CME “home.”

The module on PediaLink has been developed in collaboration with the AAP Early Brain and Child Development (EBCD) Project Advisory Group, the AAP Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care, the AAP Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics and the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute LLC.

“We determined that the interactive capabilities of the Internet would lend themselves to a problem-based or case-based approach,” said Heidi M. Feldman, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, one of three pediatric child development specialists who was selected to work on the project.

The group developed four case modules: crying in an infant, sleep problems in an infant, language delays in a toddler and overactive preschooler.

“We set about to create some cases that revolve around development and behavior in the first three years of life, which hopefully demonstrate the interaction of biological and psychosocial factors in both etiology and treatment,” said Dr. Feldman. She said the modules give pediatricians “a flavor for how to handle these situations in routine office practice.

“We’re hoping people who aren’t used to working with the Internet in their clinical practice will see what a vast gold mine this is,” said Dr. Feldman.

Each module will contain:

• the latest EBCD information;
• case-based interactive teaching tools;
• methods for incorporating family teaching and anticipatory guidance into a busy practice;
• tools and techniques for efficient and effective child evaluation;
• parent/family education materials that can be downloaded;
• age-appropriate assessment tools;
• full-text access to selected references; and
• CME credit and self-assessment components.

“Because it’s on the Internet, what we’ve tried to do is offer links to materials if they’re stuck at a particular point or at the end (and) they want to read on about more. There are tools and references throughout. Sometimes it’s tables; sometimes it’s a Web site. A lot of times it’s materials from the Academy, she added.

“The main purpose of this initiative is to highlight for pediatricians the most recent research related to early brain development and identify strategies to enable the findings from that research to enhance pediatric practice,” said Paul H. Dwarkin, M.D., FAAP, a member of the EBDC Planning Group.

“The research findings clearly emphasize the critical importance of the early years in terms of appropriate stimulation and the importance of nurturing and leading to optimal brain growth and optimal brain development,” he said.

But because early brain and development studies generally are published in specialty pediatric journals, pediatricians are not always exposed to the most current information.

“So the question is, given those implications, how can pediatricians deliver care in such a way that interactions between parents and young infants can be strengthened?” Dr. Dwarkin asked.

The module is just one project developed by the AAP Early Brain and Child Development Planning Group. Others include:

• town forums in major cities or over the Internet to discuss a range of child development issues with pediatricians and parents;
• lectures on early brain research;
• a supplement that includes a series of challenging cases, jointly published in Pediatrics and the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics; and
• a visiting professorship.

Additional information about EBDC Project Advisory Group initiatives can be found on the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute Web site at www.jjpp.com/ProfessionalPartnership/partnership_ebcd.htm. To access the PediaLink module, visit www.pedialink.org.

eQIPP: an online self-assessment

Now available online is the AAP Education in Quality Improvement for Pediatric Practice (eQIPP), an online continuing medical education (CME) program that allows a pediatrician to conduct a self-assessment by analyzing practice data on a particular topic. The pediatrician then can find resources to support improvement and develop an online collaboration with colleagues and experts.

Participants can seek and share advice electronically. Practicing pediatricians are linked to one another and to experts in a particular field via e-mail.

Pediatricians also can track CME hours and gain access to reference materials relating to areas of improvement through PediaLink.

eQIPP’s program infrastructure is supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Pfizer Pediatric Health and has been developed in collaboration with the National Initiative for Children’s Healthcare Quality. For additional information on eQIPP, visit www.eQIPP.org.