

WHY THE MARCH OF DIMES?

The following comes from Past International President, Wil Bleckman, MD, who introduced Young Children: Priority One in 1990.

“I was a sophomore in medical school when Dr. Jonas Salk announced the success of his research team’s vaccine in preventing polio. Dr. Salk’s research, along with the research of many others, had been funded by the March of Dimes....by the time that I graduated from medical school, there were no more children-or adults-still in iron lungs. Thanks to the March of Dimes.

Their support in supporting preventive vaccine almost put the March of Dimes out of business, but they did what successful organizations have done over the years and re-invented themselves. They have subsequently publicized the use of folic acid in preventing brain and spinal cord abnormalities at birth, but their major effort now is in supporting research to determine the causes of prematurity and the actions needed to decrease it.

If children are born before 36 weeks gestation in the womb, they are considered premature. The earlier the child is born, however, the more dangerous it is for the life and/or health of the child.

For example, there are children born so small they can fit in a person’s open hand. Many of these children won’t make it. In fact, children born under 2 pounds have a 50% mortality rate. Over 2 pounds the rate drops significantly....Very small children are likely to have bleeding in the brain and to have atrophy of parts of the brain. They may have significant visual impairments, and mental retardation is not uncommon in the smallest children....About 61% of all premature children will be diagnosed with a disability at some time compared to 23% of those born “at term” i.e. when they should have been born....Premature children are more likely to have behavior problems in school, to be inattentive or show signs of ADHD. Learning disabilities are more common as is low achievement....Premature babies are more likely to remain small, to have delayed development and to have an increase in respiratory infections, and they are 8 times more likely to be abused.

The sooner we can find ways to prevent premature births, the better....and when Kiwanis supports the March of Dimes, it is helping that organization both in supporting the research into the problem and some of the therapeutic modalities that are needed to treat those who have been born too small.”

HOW CAN CLUBS SUPPORT THE MARCH OF DIMES?

One way is to send a contribution to the March of Dimes. Another way is to participate in the March of Dimes Annual “WalkAmerica” this spring. Your club can sponsor a team of walkers (no minimum number of walkers required so one member can be a team), support the walker with a pledge, serve on the planning committee, sponsor a “Mile Marker” or sponsor a “Check Point” along the walk route.

For more information, clubs in Canada can go to www.marchofdimes.org and clubs in the United States can go to www.marchofdimes.com.

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Young Children: Priority One