

MedChild's Approach to addressing Children and Youth Health: A Pediatric Center for the Mediterranean

(Presentation and debate for a Mediterranean sharing)

Introductory paper by **Bruno Musso**
President of MedChild Institute

Abstract

What is MedChild

Established in 2004, but designed one year earlier in Amman, the “Fondazione Istituto Mediterraneo per l’Infanzia - MedChild Institute” is, and more and more intends to be, as per its contents, “Mediterranean expression” while, as per its roots, an institutional expression of Italy.

MedChild was created to «promote and pursue the child’s right to grow as person, in suitable conditions for his physical and mental health, his safety, protection against economical and social difficulties, the positive contribution to relational environments he is involved in and the realization of his human potential», to understand and contribute to improve children’s condition in the Mediterranean Area. Therefore, doing that, it mainly considers the results of initiatives, taking care of efficiency factors of undertaken activities and adopted instruments. Besides, the reference to the child’s person (evolutive personality open to the interpersonal community) imposes to MedChild a wide and multi-disciplinary mission, in which many different factors of the person are object of study, assistance and, in the last necessary instance, of love.

MedChild operational area is the Mediterranean Sea, in its broadest sense as the ensemble of Countries which, in centuries, have been washed, not so much by its waters, as by cultures cherished by its waters and actually matching the ensemble of the Euro-Mediterranean Paternariat and the so-called MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Region.

At this very moment the following institutions adhere to MedChild, the Gaslini and IME¹ Foundations, as “founder members”, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Arab Urban Development Institute in Ryad, representing the major four hundred Arab towns, the Royal Scientific Society in Amman, the Ospedale Bambino Gesù and the Province, the Municipality and the Chamber of Commerce of Genoa, as “institutional participants”, while some Italian regions are evaluating the possibility of adhering and qualified foreign operators are defining forms of cooperation (there are memorandum of understanding with Libya and Morocco).

How MedChild operates

To be successful in its mission, from the very beginning, MedChild choose to:

- Not operate directly, but to design, promote and manage interventions of operators, who are qualified in the specific sectors, being both direction and coordination centre of a complex and highly multidisciplinary set of initiatives;
- Prefer initiatives and instruments fulfilling the less satisfied needs, for which it, directly or indirectly, avails of the most qualified capacities: first of all quality pediatrics, a sector where the offer is weak and MedChild competencies are high;
- Always expect quality and accuracy by interacting with universities, scientific institutes and research centers, always avoiding any academic temptations, faithful to its DNA, which rather aims to combine “mission” with “entrepreneurship”;

¹ IME Foundation – The Istituto Mediterraneo per l’Ematologia was established in 2003 in Rome by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Economy and Health and Regione Lazio.

- Select, in the last resort, intervention sectors and operative modalities, according to their proved efficiency;
- Offer cues to the main stakeholders for their free choices, refraining from judgments or rules for behaviors or initiatives, it cannot take part in.

What MedChild does

To Understand

People looking after the Mediterranean child to improve its condition, first of all have to understand the “*de facto*” and “*de iure*” situation and, as far as possible, share it with the area operators.

This *Charting the Mediterranean Child*², designed as a yearly report about the Mediterranean children situation with statistic data and one or more synthetic indices, was, from the very beginning, dedicated to the “*de facto*” situation. The above mentioned indices (“*MedChild Well-Being Index*”), which, with no doubts, introduce innovative elements in the specific sector, have still being refined and tested by Amsterdam University, together with the World Bank and find, in this edition, a first, provisional target.

As far as the “*de iure*” situation and its understanding, which is aimed to its improvement, are concerned, MedChild is planning to dedicate a Master of “Children Rights and their implementation” together with Italian and Mediterranean universities.

To bring out the best

Having defined the instruments needed for understanding, one should think of the several and different initiatives, institutional and spontaneous, for children and of the way to encourage them, disseminate them and push them to increase quality targets. To this aim, the *MedChild Award for the Best Practices*³ was created to bring out the best done in any part of the Mediterranean Area rather than to “teach” something. Indeed, it was designed to support the research, selection, promotion and dissemination of the best practices in children’s care. The first edition of the Prize was awarded in Dubai in May 2005, with three prizes and five mentions, and it will be repeated every two/three years, refining the preliminary selection phase and taking care of its wide sharing and *follow-up*, the first edition insufficiently benefited from.

To intervene

Having activated the tools for understanding and bringing out the best practices, it seemed to us reasonable to design specific interventions, under our full responsibility, starting from those founded on excellence pediatrics, which, as already said above, meets a wide and outstanding need and is one of best competence of MedChild.

We choose to work in harness with the IME Foundation, which is one of MedChild’s founder members, according to a very articulated approach, providing:

- A systematic ensemble of interventions aimed to “transfer the know-how, training, tele-assistance and hospitalization to Italy of cases, which cannot be otherwise treated”, extended to the design assistance for hospitalization and treatment structures and the related infrastructural context;

² 2004 edition was sponsored and funded by Fondazione Gaslini and presented at the International Conference opening 2004 – Genoa European Capital of Culture along with MedChild, launched in that occasion. 2005 and 2006 editions, as well as the studies for the development of a child-welfare index connected, are promoted by MedChild with the essential contribution of Compagnia di San Paolo.

³ Promoted by MedChild with the fundamental economic support of Fondazione CARIPOLO.

- The use of not conventional instruments, such as “mobile pediatric system for emergency and tele-diagnosis” (the first unit, currently operating in remote areas of South Jordan and supported by Al-Kerak Italian Hospital, owned by ANSMI⁴, has already examined more than eleven thousand children, who had never seen a doctor before and hospitalized one hundred and eighty children in Jordan hospitals and two in Italian hospitals, A considerable increase of operations is requested to further develop these activities);
- Pediatric missions on logistic Ships of the Italian Navy (the first one to Tripoli at the end of 2004) to make a diagnosis and assist children of the host country, compare local and MedChild’s doctors and train the first ones *on the job*;
- Development of technological tele-health networks (tele-consulting, *second opinion* and tele-diagnosis) supporting a widespread penetration of pediatric assistance on the ground;
- Creation of a *Clinical Trial Office* for the pediatric medicine (the child is not a small adult as the market tends to consider him) for the whole Mediterranean Area, especially considering pathologies disappeared from the most developed areas;
- Assimilation of cultural approaches typical of the different Countries, with a special consideration of the maternal care practices, in collaboration with universities (The Department of Anthropology of Genoa University owns a rich ethno-medicine museum);
- Constant integration of the pediatric intervention into an holistic approach the child person.

Also considering the last aspect, other interventions, under direct responsibility of MedChild, have being identified and very likely will focus on:

- Early Childhood care and development;
- collection and distribution of Mediterranean games, toys and tales favoring the children’s growth, the understanding of the different cultural and religious roots of the Mediterranean Area and a dialog, hopefully more open than usual, among adults operating for the child;
- education;
- interaction with the urban development, mainly followed by the Arab Urban Development Institute, which is one of MedChild’s Institutional Participants.

A look at the future

Established by Fondazione Gerolamo Gaslini, MedChild recently knew a new season and entered a new phase of its development: independent from its founder, supported by a diversified group of institutions and operators and projected into an increasing Mediterranean dimension. In this new situation MedChild launched two major projects, which, together with smaller ones, are likely to mark the next years of activity.

CPM – Mediterranean Pediatric Center

Through CPM, MedChild intends to structure and consolidate all its pediatric activities. Indeed, what we might also call “Dream project” is aimed to establish an excellence pediatric hospital, completely dedicated to the Mediterranean Area and made up of “Mediterranean sections” of pediatric hospitals supporting MedChild, mobile units and a pediatric ship, to be designed with the Italian Navy (a medium-size hospital ship, CPM’s “technological and telematic heart, available to face humanitarian emergencies, support of all MedChild’s initiatives, being itinerant and cooperative).

⁴ Associazione Nazionale di Sostegno ai Missionari Italiani. It owns and manages five hospitals: Amman, Al-Kerak, Damascus, Haifa, and Tangier. It cooperates with MedChild on the basis of a general agreement and, as far as the cited mission is concerned, of a specific agreement signed by both parties with the Ministry of Health of the Jordan Hashemite Kingdom.

A Pilot project in Iraq

An important and integrated intervention has been recently launched by IME/MedChild in “Northern Iraq – Kurdistan Autonomous Region” supported and funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This Ministry considers MedChild, as “independent agency, representing the Mediterranean Area”, the natural director of its own children’s assistance interventions in the Mediterranean. Genetic pathologies, which have been already assessed in that region by IME, are extraordinarily frequent and severe. Moreover, a long segregation excluded the managing class (doctors included) from updating, (differently from what normally happens all over the Mediterranean), and kept to the lowest level structures and infrastructures, dedicated to the children’s treatment and health service.

MedChild intends to make a true pilot project, in which the above-mentioned instruments and design hypotheses can be checked and tested. Above all, provided that we can cope with our dreams and ambitions, we intend to make this project a real meeting occasion for peoples, who find the reason and occasion to know and appreciate each other in the common care of children: a small, but important and probably indispensable contribution to the construction of that *Mediterranean peace*, which is as much necessary as difficult.

This session: presentation and debate for a Mediterranean sharing

We wanted and designed this open forum to achieve, starting from presentation and debate, the first Mediterranean sharing of the above mentioned activities.

As I said above, MedChild, because of its original choice, is, and more and more intends to be, “Mediterranean expression”, as per its contents, and “Italian institutional expression” as per its primary roots. This conjugation is apparently difficult, but actually essential and perfectly possible, since many true friends of the Mediterranean Area, and of Arab countries in particular, have clearly demonstrated to share and support our path, also in difficult steps, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fully respecting our autonomy of thought, method and choice, looks for our increasing involvement. In any case, we will look for the above mentioned conjugation unremittingly, ready to an open debate with those operating in Mediterranean Area in favor of children like us but with different roots and missions. In fact the best initiative might turn out to be ineffective, or even counter-productive, if eluding this discussion process claiming to impose itself because of internal efficiency.

In this introduction I just sketched out the different initiatives, stressing the ensemble to make reasons and method come out in a better way.

Now it will be possible to describe the pediatric approach, which will connote CPM, after “trial” in the Pilot project (MD Ilja Gardi), to outline the first choices related to the pediatric ship (Amm. Vincenzo Martines), to explain the approach and activities of the Clinical Trial Office related to the pediatric medicine (MD Ornella Della Casa Alberighi), to take note of considerations of some important exponents of the Mediterranean health services, who, as discussants, will start the debate and sharing dialog process.