EDITORIAL


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Special healthcare needs refers to any physical, developmental, mental, sensory, behavioural, cognitive, or emotional impairment or limiting condition that requires medical management, health care intervention, and/or use of specialized services or programs due to limitations in performing daily self-maintenance activities or substantial limitations in a major life activity (1). The definition of special healthcare and people with disability is interchangeable for the similarity of the needs and burden for the individual and their parents. During COVID-19 pandemic, there were two main impacts currently highlighted to the parents of special healthcare needs children. The higher cost of caring special healthcare needs children poses significant economic burden because the total costs often exceed family's expectation due to the complex care. As noted by studies, having a special healthcare needs child refers to a long-term challenge for parents, no matter what type and degree of disability the special needs children have (2). Further, this issue may contribute to mental health problems among parents with special healthcare needs children.

Managing special healthcare needs children during the COVID-19 pandemic was a big challenge for parents, especially from the economic, emotional, mental and well-being standpoints (5). Economic burden can be defined as the costs incurred from monetary or non-monetary resources to deal with specific condition or diseases (6). Economic evaluation can be estimated using proper approach where it is differ from accounting or financial definition is called cost analysis approach (7). This analysis of costs for alternative treatments or health programs is relevant for all types of economic analysis. The cost analysis was done to explore economic burden associated with specific condition or health problems, where all the expenditures incurred relatives to the treatments in managing special healthcare needs children were calculated. The goods to be taken into consideration are e.g. money, time spent and resources. Costs were calculated from societal and/or parents perspectives where, divided into direct and indirect costs. Direct costs are the costs involved in relation to the care directly and in term of monetary such as hiring personal physiotherapist for home physical therapy. While indirect costs are the costs incurred by loss of productivity due to time spent in managing special healthcare needs children. For example, a mother spent 4 hours in managing their special healthcare needs child, which the indirect cost was estimated from salary of RM1,200 per months and calculated for 0.08 cent salary per minute. Thus, 240 minutes spent multiple with 0.08 cents to obtain indirect cost.

Several studies highlighted that high cost was incurred from the direct and indirect expenses of families to provide the best health care treatment for their child with disabilities (2,7,8,) which is not surprising. Long-term rehabilitation costs associated with the disability affects the family's future economic performance and well-being, more significantly so when compared to a family with a typical child.
As noted by studies, having a child with disability refers to a long-term challenge for parents, no matter what type and degree of disability the special needs children have. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nationwide home quarantine that mandated schools and rehabilitation training institutions’ closure required hundreds of children with disabilities to stay at home for months. Some children with disabilities might experience increased mental health issues among people, especially parents with special needs, due to the increasing economic burden and psychological stress in managing their children during this critical period. Thus, further study in this regard should be explored to identify costs incurred in managing children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic that poses economic burden and increase parenting stress.

REFERENCES


