

Immigrant baby in Britain refused operation to prevent paralysis

By Joan Smith
25 March 2013

Eight-month-old Sanika Ahmed from Portsmouth, England has been denied National Health Service (NHS) treatment because of her parents' immigrant status. Sanika has Erb's Palsy, also known as Brachial Plexus Paralysis, which is a condition mainly caused by trauma during birth. It can affect all five primary nerves that supply movement and feeling to the arms and can lead to partial or complete paralysis.

Early intervention is crucial, as treatment in the first year can have a significant impact on recovery. Sanika's parents have been told that if she does not receive treatment before the age of nine months, she will be permanently paralysed in her arm.

Sanika was born at the Queen Alexandra hospital in Portsmouth and referred to the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (RNOH) in Middlesex in July and October 2012 for an operation to restore movement in her arm. She was receiving physiotherapy in the meantime.

The Ahmeds were contacted last November and asked for proof they were entitled to treatment by the National Health Service. Muhammad Ahmed had been working legally in the UK since July 2008 on a work permit, but the hospital withdrew all treatment after it discovered the permit had expired in August 2009. Sanika's parents have applied to stay permanently in Britain, but with the hearing not set until next month, it will be too late to save Sanika from being permanently paralysed.

The RNOH claims, "In February 2013, we received a letter from Mr. Ahmed's legal representatives regarding this matter and we replied offering to treat Sanika as a private patient. We received no reply to this offer."

Private treatment for Erb's Palsy runs into the tens of thousands of pounds, so none but the rich could afford

such treatment.

Sanika's mother, Syeda, commented, "I was shocked and I was crying when I was told because they had already begun treating my baby and suddenly it stopped. I can't believe they have denied the treatment for my baby. An operation has to be done now before it is too late.

"We have been given advice from a Bangladeshi specialist and from a specialist here [in the UK], and they all say that if Sanika does not have an operation in the next month, she will be paralysed for life in her arm.

"Sanika is slowly, slowly getting paralysed and it is very upsetting for all our family. It is not easy to look after Sanika and I have to watch her all the time because if she falls she cannot get up by herself.

"Sanika cannot sit properly because she cannot balance. One person has to be with her almost all of the time. It is very difficult," Syeda concluded.

The family's solicitor, Patrick Oliver, stated, "Our immediate concern is to challenge the decision to refuse medical treatment because time is running out for Sanika ... Sanika was born in the UK, yet she is a victim of injustice and unfairness. She is not a 'health tourist' and treatment that has already started in the UK should continue in the UK."

This was in reference to the government's recent crackdown on the rights of immigrants to access the NHS and the divisive campaign to label them as "health tourists," despite them working and living in the UK. Such language by the government and media is used to scapegoat some of the most vulnerable sections of society for the NHS crisis—one imposed by the ruling elite through draconian cuts to funding, attacks on health workers' jobs, terms and conditions, and privatisation.

If it suits the interests of the British ruling elite, the government and media will not hesitate to cynically preach the virtues of human rights when similar incidents occur in other countries. And the resources can be found when it suits the government's propaganda war.

Take the case of 15-year-old Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousufzai, who was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan in October 2012 for campaigning for the right of girls to education. The British government launched a media blitz, flying her to the UK, where she underwent hours of surgery at a top NHS hospital to repair the damage caused by a bullet that grazed her brain.

This week, Malala started school at the private Edgbaston High School for girls in Birmingham and is expected to secure residence in the UK, as her father, Ziauddin, has secured a post with the Pakistani Consulate in Birmingham. The same courtesy should be immediately extended to Sanika Ahmed as a matter of course.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>