

Retinopathy in pre-term babies

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At a recent conference in Europe, eye specialists and researchers warned of a growing epidemic of blindness among babies. It's condition that was first noted in rich countries like Australia and the United States but is now apparently taking hold in middle income and poor nations.

It's called retinopathy of prematurity – ROP - and is a complication of neonatal intensive care of pre-term babies. ROP was once thought to be caused by giving these babies too much oxygen but Australian research has shown that it's more fluctuations in oxygen levels that do the harm so very good oxygen control is needed.

While the problem's not solved in countries like ours, it's a lot better. But in nations which are just starting to ventilate premature babies, they haven't learned these lessons – with disastrous results.

It's another example of how having evidence for good care isn't enough. You've got to spread the message effectively. In this case it means an urgent transfer of knowledge from richer nations to poorer ones.