

The World Health Report 2005 - Make Every Mother and Child Count

World Health Report
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The World Health Report 2005 addresses the plight of millions of mothers who die during childbirth, and the many children who die as newborns and infants. These deaths can be prevented by adequate and timely health care. Even in the 21st century, health care in many parts of the world has not been optimal, as 10 million children and half a million mothers still die each year. The statistics show 68,000 die as a consequence of unsafe abortions, 3.3 million babies are stillborn, 4 million die within 28 days of life and 6.6 million children die before their fifth birthday. To rectify the problem, the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), were internationally agreed upon. These developmental goals aspire to achieve universal access to healthcare by 2015. The main obstacles that stand in the way in achieving these goals are humanitarian crises, pervasive poverty and other health care issues like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The report highlights these maternal and child health issues. It reflects on the disparity in healthcare as it is not a universal phenomenon across rich and poor countries or among rich and poor within the same country. As in many countries, healthcare systems are developed based on health district models, which provide basic healthcare and use referral hospitals for specialized care. Many women and children are excluded from these health care systems because of socioeconomic barriers and lack of adequate healthcare facilities. The poor countries of Sub-Saharan Africa live in extreme poverty and lack human and financial resources. Their governments should make

viable healthcare policies that are easy to implement and that ensure a continuum of care. As giving birth is a most rewarding experience in any women's life, it is equally important that the mother receives adequate antenatal care and appropriate emotional and financial support. Healthcare workers have the opportunity to contribute in educating mothers to understand the importance of adequate nutrition, the adverse nature of AIDS/HIV, sexually-transmitted diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, and in helping in family planning and preparing the couples for parenthood. Unsafe abortion is another major healthcare issue, as 60% of the 46 million abortions worldwide are carried out under unsafe conditions, leading to considerable mortality and morbidity and thus increasing the financial burden on society.

The reports also focuses on women facing complications during pregnancy, labor, childbirth and in the postpartum period. Maternal deaths occurring during this period are mostly avoidable as appropriate medical solutions are available today. The direct causes of maternal death are around 80% and are attributed to hemorrhage, infections, eclampsia and obstructed labor, while the indirect causes account for 20% of the global total and are due to malaria, anemia, HIV/AIDS and cardio-vascular diseases. The women experience various complications after giving birth such as uterine prolapse, fistulas, urinary incontinence, pain after poor episiotomy repair, perineal tear, nutritional deficiency and depression. Postpartum care is often neglected and needs as much emphasis as antenatal care to ensure continu-

ity of care. The challenge that remains is not technological but strategic and organizational.

Health problems of newborns have also been underestimated and are often neglected. Special efforts are being made to reduce neonatal mortality and morbidity by providing appropriate training to caregivers and the organizations providing services. Re-designing maternal and child healthcare has been the focal point for many countries of the world. Historically the efforts date back to the 1970's when UNICEF through its GOBI program tried to improve child care through growth monitoring, oral rehydration therapy for diarrhea, breastfeeding and immunization. The goal of the expanded program of immunization was to provide coverage to 80% of children across the world. The rehydration program in children with diarrhea-related deaths were reduced from 4.6 million in 1970 to 1.8 million in 2000. The promotion of breastfeeding in infants in-

creased from 19% in 1990 to 38% in the 2002. Thus some countries felt the reduced death rate because of such awareness programs while the impact across the board was not significant.

In conclusion, the report's focus is on the importance of handling maternal, newborn and child health within a broad spectrum of health system development. Politics and socioeconomic development have been the key barrier in developing sustainable programs in many of the countries that have been discussed in the report. The report makes recommendations for infrastructure and skills development of health workers, parity in compensation, and for preventing the brain drain from public to private sector. It is absolutely essential that there is a will and commitment beyond the political wrangling of decision makers. Only then will it be possible to develop successful programs across the board.
