

World Health Organization launches a network to improve quality of care for mothers, newborns and children

Dear Editor:

The period around childbirth has been acknowledged as the most crucial time span for saving the lives of mothers and newborns, and in averting stillbirths [1]. The available global estimates suggest that in the year 2015, in excess of 5.5 million women and newborns lost their lives owing to complications in pregnancy, childbirth and in the first month of their life, including 0.3 million maternal deaths, 2.7 million newborn deaths, and 2.6 million stillbirths [1]. Moreover, under the newly proposed Sustainable Development Goals, ambitious targets have been set pertaining to maternal and child health [1-2].

However, the most important fact is that a significant proportion of deaths occur due to preventable causes, and they can be easily prevented by delivery of quality care during pregnancy and childbirth [1]. Further, the findings of research have revealed that almost 3 million lives of mothers and children can be saved annually across the globe by ensuring better quality coverage of care around the time of birth and care of small and sick newborns in high burden nations [2]. Moreover, it is quite a known phenomenon that the quality of care varies within and between nations, and often never takes into account the basic rights and dignity of those who seek it [2].

In order to respond to the existing scenario and to improve the quality of care, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund have launched a network for improving quality of care for maternal, newborn and child health [2]. The aim of the network is to minimize preventable causes of maternal and newborn illness / deaths, and to improve the overall experience of care for each mother [2]. The planned vision is based on the delivery of good quality care throughout the antenatal, childbirth and the postnatal period by health

professionals in health care establishments [2]. Eventually, the planned network will work on the principles of quality, equity and dignity [2].

The rationale for the establishment of the network is that birth in health care facilities have increased in the last decade, and so it is essential to shift our focus from access to care to improve the quality of care [2]. In-fact, 9 nations have adopted this network, with a target to reduce preventable deaths of pregnant women and newborns in their health facilities by 50% within the next 5 years [1]. These nations have to strengthen their capacity & health workforce to plan and manage quality improvement, upgrade their data collection mechanism, functional referral systems & functioning ambulances for emergency transportation, and enhance access to medicines, logistics, health equipment, clean water and proper waste management [1-4]. Furthermore, the health stakeholders have to identify quality of care focal points at all levels of the health care delivery system, and then expedite & sustain the execution of quality-of-care improvement services for mothers and children [1-2].

Simultaneously, the WHO has formulated specific standards for improving the quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities to assist nations in ensuring that provided services are safe, effective, timely, efficient, equitable and people-centered [5]. These standards of care deals with both routine care as well as with management of women and their babies related complications during labour, childbirth and the early postnatal period [5]. In-fact, six strategic areas (viz. clinical guidelines, standards of care, effective interventions, quality measures, research and

capability building) have been identified to ensure the delivery of a systematic and evidence-based approach to provide guidance for improving the quality of mother and child care [5]. To conclude, it is a right of every mother and infant to receive the highest possible levels of

quality of care when they access health care establishments within their communities. Thus, it is the need of the hour to adopt the standards for improving the quality of maternal and newborn care and aim for improvement in the quality of care.

References

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