New year, new department — renewed hope

2005 is set to be a special year for Safe Motherhood. Not only is WHO taking an unprecedented step of having the World Health Report launched on World Health Day (7th April—more on inside pages), but the new year embraced the new Department of Making Pregnancy Safer (MPS). The Making Pregnancy Safer department’s focus is to provide accelerated support to countries with high Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR). Its mission is to help these countries develop and implement plans and programmes to provide quality maternal and newborn health care services. These services must be able to provide skilled care to all women and their babies during pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal period. The services must also ensure the effective and timely skilled care for the management of complications in pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum/neonatal period.

The new Director, Dr Q. M. Islam, a passionate and persistent advocate for Safe Motherhood with a track record of country, regional and headquarters experiences, arrived at his post from the South-East Regional Office where he was Director of Family and Community Health. Fully aware of what countries need, Dr Islam is leading his team in Geneva to create a contingency strategy to coordinate actions to save lives and serve the needs of pregnant women and newborn babies.

Dr Islam says, “the new department’s priority is to realign the Making Pregnancy Safer workplan with the mission of country implementation as clearly indicated by the Director-General, Dr Lee Jong-Wook and the Assistant Director-General, Joy Phumaphi”. Joy Phumaphi said that, “WHO must provide our Member Countries and the global community, with the technical advice and support they need to address the tragic loss of mothers and newborns. To do this we must fulfill our technical leadership position and work with Ministries of Health to help them coordinate the activities to benefit women, newborns and families—so that making childbirth safer can become a reality for all”.

To achieve this will require strong leadership. Dr Islam has proven his strengths in all these areas and will work with his team, key stakeholders and partners to achieve better health for mothers and babies.

From the 6th of April, BBC World TV will start transmitting 7 part documentary entitled “Fight for Life” at peak hours of each region (see page 8). This series will explore the issues surrounding conception, pregnancy, birth and early childhood around the world and tell the stories of the mothers, fathers, babies, and health workers fighting in the frontlines to make each life count.

7-9 April, following the launch of the World Health Report (WHR-05) in Delhi, the Partnership for Safe Motherhood and Newborn Health, of which WHO is a member, will be hosting a meeting with other key partners, and partnerships, to discuss how best to scale up the recommendations in the WHR-05.
Make every mother and child count

Slogan for World Health Day 2005

The slogan for this year’s World Health Day reflects the reality that today, the health of women and children is still not a priority for many governments and the international community.

For this reason, 2005 is a golden opportunity for maternal, newborn, and child health, when both World Health Day and World Health Report focus on this important theme. On 7 April 2005, World Health Day and the World Health Report will highlight the invisible health crisis which results in the deaths of women having babies, and of neonates and young children.

Through these efforts we can focus global attention on what should have long been obvious: every mother, and every child, counts. They count because they are the wealth of the world community. Healthy mothers and children are the bedrock of healthy and prosperous communities and nations.

To accompany this important event WHO, in the lead up to World Health Day on 7 April, has been following six mothers-to-be living in different countries of the world who have agreed to share their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. The stories can be read on the WHO web site Great Expectations. They follow the lives and events of Damiana, Samah, Hiwot, Renu, Bounlid and Claire and are updated at regular periods. Stories of each birth will all be recorded on this special web site.

These are six unique stories, but they reflect a common theme—the central importance of maternal and child health to our families, communities and societies. In a world where more than half a million women die in childbirth every year and where four million newborns each year do not survive beyond one month, these documentaries aim to raise awareness of the challenges we face as a global community in improving maternal and newborn health. They will also draw attention to the pressing need to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing maternal deaths by three-quarters, and reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

The Director-General has made a personal call to everyone to make World Health Day 2005 a unique opportunity not just to highlight the magnitude of the problem, but to bring all stakeholders together to apply the solutions that work. To assist organizations and agencies take an activate part in this year’s events, WHO has developed a Toolkit. The Director-General says “whatever kind of event you decide to organize, we hope our World Health Day toolkit will help you leverage the maximum impact, however modest your budget”. He urges everyone to use the World Health Day materials and graphics, photographs and features, including the WHO web site to build new alliances and partnerships. Finally, he asks us all to use our own creativity to start now, and help to ensure we generate change that will last well beyond 7 April 2005. Above all, to emphasize the need to promote the health of mothers and their children everywhere.

Visit www.who.int/features/great_expectations/en/
Making Pregnancy Safer in the African Region had much to celebrate in the preceding year. In February 2004 WHO/AFRO convened a meeting in Harare to develop a “Road Map” for accelerated maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality reduction. This was in response to the call of the “Second Regional Reproductive Health Task force meeting”, held in Dakar in October 2003, urging WHO/AFRO and partners to work with governments and professional bodies to accelerate the availability of skilled care. The “Road Map” marked consensus among partners to provide coordinated support to countries. The objectives of the “Road Map” are to: 1) Provide skilled attendance during pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal period at all levels of the health system 2) Strengthen the capacity of individuals, families and communities to improve maternal and newborn health.

MPS recognizes the capital role of communities in ensuring the use of services and improving access to services. In this regard, Reproductive Health programme managers received orientation on the WHO “Maternal and newborn Health: Framework for the Promotion and Implementation of Community-Based interventions” and comprehensive approach to birth and emergency preparedness and working with individuals, families and communities for improved Maternal and Newborn Health during the second Regional RH Programme managers’ meeting held in July 2004. Subsequently, Mozambique was supported to develop a programme to ensure the availability of clean delivery kits at community level, ‘Maama kit’ Initiative, in collaboration with a community-based NGO and Zimbabwe to develop an emergency community ambulance to facilitate referrals from the community.

With the strong resolve to assist countries increase access to skilled care, AFRO organized in September, in collaboration with the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), an inter-country meeting on “Strengthening Skilled Care in the African Region”. This meeting brought together health professionals involved in Midwifery education, training and practice regulations from: Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Professional associations (national societies of Gynecologists and Obstetricians and Midwifery associations) were also represented. The main outcome of the meeting was consensus on the minimum competences for midwifery care and a framework for the development of midwifery care standards in the African Region. All the country teams developed plans of action for strengthening midwifery care in their respective countries.

Improving the quality of care is high priority for MPS in the African Region. Pursuing this long-term commitment, September 2004 saw the official launch, in Nairobi, of the WHO manual on the different maternal death review methodologies, “Beyond the Numbers: Reviewing maternal deaths and complications to make pregnancy safer”. The launch was followed by a training of trainers’ workshop. The trainers will support countries in building capacity in the conduct of maternal death reviews. Participants at both events included professional associations, partners, donors and UN Agencies.

Finally, the year ended with the adoption of the “Road Map for accelerating the attainment of the MDGs related to maternal and newborn Health in Africa” during the 54th Regional Committee of Health Ministers’ held in Brazzaville in September 2004. To this end, the RC54 passed a resolution on the implementation of the “Road Map” (Resolution AFR/RC54/R9). The “Road Map” has also been presented to the African Union (AU) Commission for Social Affairs and forms the basis for the AU plan of Action for maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality in Africa.

To assist countries in the stepwise and comprehensive approach in the implementation of the “Road Map” at country level, a Framework for the implementation of the “Road Map” was developed. Thirteen countries have already undertaken steps for the implementation of the “Road Map” at country level.

Making Pregnancy Safer in AFRO, in collaboration with the partners is set to capitalize and build on these achievements in the coming year and along with the rest of the world looks forward with eagerness to the World Health Day to bring maternal and newborn health to the attention of the global community at large.

For further information on MPS activities in AFRO, contact Dr Seipati Mothebesoane-Anoh, <mothebesoanea@afro.who.int>, Tel +47 241 39189.
Americas Regional Office (PAHO)

PAHO/WHO in the Americas Region is spearheading several activities for World Health Day in Washington DC and at the country level. The 7th of April also marks the start of Health in the Americas week. Demonstrating the strong commitment of PAHO/WHO to improving maternal and child health in the Americas, the Regional Steering Committee for World Health Day, which included a wide constituency of stakeholders, has been meeting regularly to coordinate activities in DC and around the Region, and to mobilize diverse constituencies to raise awareness and promote actions to improve the health of mothers and children.

As in past years the main event on World Health Day will be presided over by the PAHO Director, Dr Mirta Roses Periago, and will feature the U.S. Secretary for Health and Human Resources, to call for action on this year’s theme and to recognize a champion of health in the Region. During the week 7th-14th April, a photo exhibit of images of pregnant women from the Americas will be displayed at PAHO HQ. Also, throughout the week there will be a number of technical panels and workshops: the first on domestic violence and maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality; the second on “Fostering south-to-south cooperation on maternal and child health toward improving maternal and neonatal health in LAC”. The main objective of these workshops are to share experiences and lessons learned from countries in the Region. The third workshop will focus on newborn care with the aim of developing a regional strategy for neonatal mortality reduction.

Additionally, in collaboration with our units and colleagues at PIN a set of materials (posters, brochures, suggestions for activities, pins, a cartoon story on mothers and children based on a famous Brazilian character Monica) was developed and sent to each PWR. Electronic copies of all of the materials have been sent to each PWR so that country adaptations and modifications can be made. Finally, a set of fact sheets on maternal and child health is being developed, based on information and with contributions from country representatives.

A special PAHO web site for WHD 2005 has been set up. On this web site all files of print promotional materials are available for downloading and files of radio and TV PSAs will soon be available. Links to the site:


Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO)

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has, on average, a relatively high level of maternal mortality, despite the recent advances in several aspects of maternal health. In addition, the Region is characterized by wide maternal health differentials that exist between countries and within the same country. In fact, the Region comprises both countries with the highest and others with the lowest reported maternal mortality ratios in the world. These health differentials may be attributed to inter- and intra-country discrepancies in income, socioeconomic status, education, the status of women, conflict areas and other factors.

In order to accelerate the efforts of countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) has adopted the Making Pregnancy Safer Initiative as a priority strategy in reducing maternal and perinatal mortality in the Region. Technical and financial support has been maintained to develop and strengthen activities in priority countries. In addition, EMRO has extended its support in recent years to include other Member States. Due to this support and to intensified efforts by the countries of the Region, the percentages of pregnant women and deliveries attended by skilled personnel increased—between the years 1990 and 2003—by 114% (from 28% to 60%) and by 46% (from 36% to 52.5%), respectively. The adoption of the Making Pregnancy Safer strategy is expected to further accelerate the reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity through improvement of the quality, availability, accessibility and utilization of essential MNH services.

Regional activities for MPS in 2005 commenced with a very productive Regional workshop entitled “UNFPA/
WHO Joint Regional Workshop on Guidelines for Making Pregnancy Safer and Family Planning. This event was held 14-18 January 2005 in Cairo, Egypt as part of the UNFPA/WHO Strategic Partnership Programme (SPP).

SPP is a joint initiative between WHO and UNFPA for collaboration aimed at maximizing capacity building and technical support to countries in order to strengthen the provision of key health services: family planning, sexually transmitted infections/reproductive tract infections (STI/RTIs), and — starting 2005 — maternal and newborn health services for Making Pregnancy Safer.

The workshop involved key representatives from MDG priority countries — namely Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and the Republic of Yemen — in addition to Egypt and the Arab Syrian Republic. The purpose of the workshop was two-fold: 1) to introduce WHO guidelines and tools for Making Pregnancy Safer and Family Planning, and 2) to develop a joint plan of action for the adaptation and dissemination of these tools based on country needs, which will ensure coordination of activities from both UNFPA and WHO at the country level. Technical support to finalize and implement this action plan will be provided by WHO/EMRO, WHO/HQ and UNFPA-CST.

For further information on Making Pregnancy Safer activities in EMRO, contact Dr Ramez Mahaini, <mahainir@emro.who.int>, Dr Hossam Mahmoud <mahmoudh@emro.who.int> Tel +202 27 65 5356.

European Regional Office (EURO)

In the European Region, wide differences still exist between and within countries in terms of maternal and newborn health indicators, as well as in access to and the quality of care. The greatest challenges within the Region to making pregnancy safer for all women and newborns include the over-medicalisation of health care, poor health education, insufficient inter-professional and multi-disciplinary collaboration, and weak structures and services at the primary health care level.

Over the past decade, WHO-Europe through its Making Pregnancy Safer (MPS) efforts has implemented a number of activities to make the interventions in maternal and newborn care applicable to the European Region Member States. This regional approach, known as Promoting Effective Perinatal Care (PEPC), was introduced a number of years ago. PEPC is now integrated within the MPS initiative and is being successfully implemented. A key element of the success of MPS/PEPC is building partnerships with key stakeholders, UN agencies, bi-lateral agencies and non-governmental organizations.

More recently, regional activities have included implementation and follow-up of the recommendations from the first regional BTN (Beyond the Numbers) workshop held in Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 2004. Participants at this workshop included key staff from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Partners such as UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (ZdravPlus, Project Hope).

Finally, in response to countries needs and requests, a regional strategy for Making Pregnancy Safer is now under development. The purpose of this document is to provide strategic directions to countries for the accelerated reduction of maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity in the European region. The intention is to contribute to dialogue and build consensus among all key stakeholders at the country level.

A recent review of the implementation of MPS in Moldova (Review of the early Implementation phase, MDA, 2004), showed that the results have been successful at different levels of the health system and provides a positive model for dissemination to other countries in the Region with similar background.

For further information on Making Pregnancy Safer activities in EURO, contact Dr Alberta Bacci, <ABA@euro.who.int>, Tel +45 3917 1462.

South-East Asia Regional Office (SEARO)

The events of December 26th 2005 have had a huge impact on the Making Pregnancy Safer work within the Region. Dr Ardi Kapiningsih Regional Advisor for Reproductive Health and the regional focal point for Making Pregnancy Safer have been assisting the Ministry of Health Indonesia for 5 weeks with the
emergency relief operations in Aceh. MPS staff from Geneva were deployed for a short period to assist the Regional Office over this time. As everyone will have heard by now the devastation in Aceh was of gigantic proportions, and the health services were almost totally devastated. Many of the health providers also lost their lives and almost all others lost homes, families and friends. In addition to helping re-establish health services the WHO Country Office is also assisting to re-establish the midwifery training programme. All three midwifery schools were damaged. Some 200 students have had their training disrupted. In order to ensure that there are sufficient skilled midwives for the Province, WHO and its partner JHPIEGO are supporting the students in alternative clinical placements, whilst at the same time re-establishing midwifery education in the Region. In Sri Lanka, Maldives and Thailand the situation is not as dire, in terms of numbers of staff lost, although they too suffered devastation to their health system, as did the other countries in the Region.

In addition to assisting all the tsunami affected countries re-establish their health services, in particular those for maternal and newborn health, the regional Making Pregnancy Safer activities have continued. Work continues to support the launch of the World Health Report and support the Partnership for Safe Motherhood and Newborn Health prepare for the High Level meeting which will follow the launch (see back page). Also, Nepal is being supported to develop their Human Resource plan for safe motherhood, where they are focusing on having a skilled attendant—a community midwife—at the primary care level, and Myanmar is being supported to strengthen their midwifery services, specifically in the area of newborn care. In Bangladesh, WHO in association with other UN partners, particularly UNFPA, continues to support the development of community-based Skilled Birth Attendants.

For further information on Making Pregnancy Safer activities in SEARO, contact Dr Ardi Kapiningsih, <Kapiningsih@who.sea.org>, Tel +91 11 2337 0804.

Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO)

A key feature of the Making Pregnancy Safer work in the Western Pacific Region has been partnership. Building on the success of the bi-regional workshop in Manila in 2003 on the progress of maternal mortality reduction, organized by WPRO and SEARO and co-sponsored by UNICEF and UNFPA, the Regional Office undertook many of its activities in collaboration with the various safe motherhood partners. The work has predominantly been focused around assisting priority countries to finalize and begin to implement their plan on maternal mortality reduction (2005-2010). The national plans for Mongolia and Viet Nam have now been finalized; China, Lao PDR and Papua New Guinea are still working on theirs. In addition, the Regional Office has been assisting countries with the adaptation and implementation of the WHO Making Pregnancy Safer manuals, specifically, ‘Managing complications in pregnancy and childbirth’, and ‘Pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and newborn care’. These two manuals have been translated into Cambodian, Chinese, Laotian, Mongolian and Vietnamese and have been used in the UNICEF- and UNFPA-funded projects in Mongolia and the Philippines. They have also been the basis for the Philippines’s Basic Emergency Obstetric Care manual for nation-wide training.

Other activities include: the development of a health education kit for communities to promote maternal and newborn care in Cambodia; collaboration on UNICEF-supported MCH project to standardize and improve antenatal care in five areas in Tibet; supporting the pilot-testing of maternity waiting home in remote and poor areas in Lao PDR; conducting comprehensive interventions and promotion of a mother-friendly hospital to improve the quality of care in Mongolia; training of skilled birth attendants and promotion of male participation in family planning in Papua New Guinea; conducting a maternal mortality survey and developing the second phase of national policy and strategy on maternal mortality reduction in Viet Nam.

Plans for the future include: exploring the possibility to pilot test the integration of emergency obstetric care into community health insurance schemes, and a regional workshop on improving the quality of maternal and newborn health services through implementing maternal death reviews/introducing practical guidelines. Tentatively this workshop will be 5-9 December 2005 and will be followed by the regional partnership for safe motherhood meeting.

For further information on Making Pregnancy Safer activities in the WPRO, contact Dr R. Pang <pangr@wpro.who.int>, Tel +632 528 9876 and Dr Sabai Latt <lattk@wpro.who.int>, Tel +632 528 9878.
recent years, new ways of measuring maternal mortality have been developed, with the needs and constraints of the problem dimensions being not generally available and assessing progress towards the goal is difficult. In recent years, new ways of measuring maternal mortality have been developed, with the needs and constraints of developing countries in particular in mind.

Managing Newborn Problems: A guide for doctors, nurses and midwives

This guide, based on the latest available evidence, provides up-to-date, authoritative clinical guidelines that are relevant to a facility with basic laboratory facilities, selected essential drugs and supplies, and the capability to provide safe blood transfusion. In some settings, the guide will be relevant to large health centres that provide childbirth care and have the capacity to care for sick or small newborn babies.

Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum and Newborn Care: A guide for essential practice

Aimed at skilled attendants working at the primary health care level in settings with limited resources, this book provides guidance on how to deliver essential care to women (and their newborn) during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period (up to six weeks after delivery).

BEYOND THE NUMBERS: Reviewing maternal deaths and complications to make pregnancy safer

Avoiding maternal deaths is possible, even in resource-poor countries, but it requires the right kind of information on which to base programmes. Knowing the level of maternal mortality is not enough; we need to understand the underlying factors that led to the deaths. Each maternal death or case of life-threatening complication has a story to tell and can provide indications on practical ways of addressing the problem. A commitment to act upon the findings of these reviews is a key prerequisite for success.

Managing Complications in Pregnancy and Childbirth

A guide for midwives and doctors

A must for midwives and doctors at the district hospital who are responsible for the care of women with complications of pregnancy, childbirth or the immediate postpartum period, including immediate problems of the newborn. Both physicians and midwives will find this manual essential for promoting and assessing the quality of health services, in the training of providers and in supporting quality services through supervision and performance feedback.

Maternal Mortality in 2000:

Country, regional and global estimates WHO - UNICEF

On an individual basis, low birthweight is an important predictor of health; efforts must therefore go into measuring it as accurately as possible at birth and organizing and planning infant care accordingly. The smaller the baby, the more important it is to monitor his or her growth in the weeks after birth. This is particularly important for infants at high risk of poor feeding and inadequate growth. Countries should therefore be encouraged to ensure accurate and reliable weighing of infants as close to birth as possible.

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT

Aimed at skilled attendants working at the primary health care level in settings with limited resources, this book provides guidance on how to deliver essential care to women (and their newborn) during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period (up to six weeks after delivery).

Making Pregnancy Safer: The critical role of the skilled attendant. A joint statement by WHO, ICM and FIGO

Aimed at skilled attendants working at the primary health care level in settings with limited resources, this book provides guidance on how to deliver essential care to women (and their newborn) during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period (up to six weeks after delivery).
developing countries.  

Almost 99% of all these deaths are in developing countries.

India  
First transmission - 6 April 2005  
The status of women in the society and decision-making power dictates pregnancy, its outcomes and access to services.

Malawi  
First transmission - 13 April 2005  
Malawi is losing its trained medical staff who are leaving for jobs abroad—especially in the UK. Only 1 in 30 vacant posts can be filled. The country is also losing staff to HIV and malaria. The impact on pregnant women and newborn babies is devastating.

Mongolia  
First transmission - 20 April 2005  
Mongolia has a health system in collapse. Maternal, neonatal and childcare technology dates back to the Soviet 50s and is disintegrating. There is change and improvement—in particular retraining and education with government and international investment. Away from the towns, maternity homes are being built to bring women closer to medical staff as childbirth approaches. Lives are being saved—but there is still a great deal to be done.

Uganda  
First transmission - 27 April 2005  
Soroti is a subsistence-farming region in eastern Uganda. Seventy-five per cent of the population are women and children, and there is high level of maternal mortality. The Regional Office for Africa (AFRO) is carrying out a unique experiment to reform the regions’ health care for pregnant women and newborn children. Everything, from family planning to emergency response is changing—with dramatic results.

Bolivia  
First transmission - 4 May 2005  
Childhood diseases become fatal in countries where the children are at risk from malnourishment. This week “Fight for Life” reports from Bolivia on what steps can be taken to eradicate malnutrition.

Bangladesh  
First transmission - 11 May 2005  
Social exclusion denies women control over sexual health and family planning. In marginalised communities these issues are a cause of social tension and resentment. This programme examines sexually transmitted diseases, contraception and family size in Bangladesh.

Afghanistan  
Wednesday 18 May at 19:30 GMT (21:30 CET)  
Traditional cultural barriers mean that getting women and children to use the existing health care services in post-conflict Afghanistan is difficult—especially in rural areas. There is investment in new systems and facilities—but cultural resistance must be overcome. Change is happening, and the lives of women are improving.

These TV series, except Bangladesh, were made possible with the generous support of Department for International Development (DFID), UK. Please visit the MPS web site <http://www.who.int/making_pregnancy_safer/en/> to view these series.

For details of the comprehensive documents on maternal and newborn health produced by the WHO Department of Making Pregnancy Safer, including all the Integrated Management of Pregnancy and Childbirth (IMIPAC) tools and guidelines, please write for a catalogue by contacting the Department of Making Pregnancy Safer at World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland  
+41 (0) 22 791.44.47/33.46  
+41 (0) 22 791.41.89  
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(if you order by e-mail please include your full postal address.)

For additional information and a complete list of our documents, many of which are available in full text, please visit our web site at  
http://www.who.int/making_pregnancy_safer/en/ or send a request for a publications catalogue.

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