

EMERGENCY OBSTETRIC AND NEWBORN CARE: CAMBODIAN MIDWIVES ARE EQUIPPED WITH CRITICAL LIFE-SAVING SKILLS

Background

Global efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 to improve maternal health are progressing, however much work remains to be done (WHO, 2013). In Cambodia, the infant mortality rate is 45 deaths per 1,000 births and the maternal mortality rate is 206 per 100,000 births (CDHS, 2010). While Cambodia has made progress in reducing maternal mortality by 58 percent since 1990, women still have trouble accessing public health services due to sociocultural and economic factors (UNFPA, 2011).

The findings from the UNFPA-supported Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (EmONC) Needs Assessment conducted in 2008 revealed that the majority of health facilities were critically understaffed and many midwives had limited expertise and skills to deal with complicated deliveries.

EmONC is an essential component in the reduction of maternal and newborn mortality. Consequently, in 2010 the Ministry of Health (MOH), the National Maternal and Child Health Centre (NMCHC), and development partners supported the EmONC Improvement Plan 2010-2015 and Cambodia's Fast Track Initiative Road Map 2010-2015 to provide training to midwives and doctors on life-saving EmONC skills, harnessing a high quality maternal and newborn care programme.

UNFPA's involvement

To roll-out the plan, four clinical training sites at sub-national levels have been established in Battambang, Kampong Cham, and Takeo, with one training unit at the NMCHC in Phnom Penh. The sites provide support to 136 basic EmONC facilities and 44 comprehensive EmONC facilities in 24 provinces.

Since 2010, UNFPA has been supporting the training of midwives in basic EmONC. Training provides an opportunity for midwives and doctors to improve their skills in basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care. It allows midwives to improve and upgrade their skills on the usage of magnesium sulfate for prevention and management of eclampsia and pre-eclampsia, teaches midwives how to perform manual vacuum extraction, imparts skills for immediate newborn care, and educates midwives on how to deal with post-partum hemorrhage.



A midwife demonstrates delivery skills under observation from other midwives in the training room of Kampong Cham Referral Hospital.

Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

Trainings on Basic EmONC and Comprehensive EmONC

Thirty five regional basic EmONC training sessions will take place in 2014, where new and experienced midwives from different provinces will come together to enhance their skills. The courses offer both theory and practice and build on the previous knowledge and expertise of midwives.

In March 2014, Ms. Poch Senghong who has been a midwife for 3 years attended her first session on life-saving skills and care for newborns in Kampong Cham referral hospital with other midwives from the region. Senghong found that the course was extremely useful for refreshing and updating her skills. She also found that the opportunity for discussion and practical demonstration amongst the other midwives was particularly valuable.

The course allowed Senghong to reflect on some practices that she does incorrectly and how she can adopt more appropriate ones. She said, "I find that the course is lively and practical – I notice what works well and what does not during the practical demonstration by each midwife."

Currently, she is based in the Pornhea Krek district hospital in Kampong Cham province where she assists hundreds of women to deliver their babies each month.

Similarly, Ms. Sor Dyna, who has been a practicing midwife for more than 20 years stressed that training is critically important for all midwives to update their skills.

Continuous efforts to improve the quality of health services

With UNFPA support, progress has been steady. The 2008 EmONC Needs Assessment found that there were 44 EmONC facilities, of which 25 were comprehensive EmONC facilities and 19 provided basic EmONC. Three years later in 2011, there were 80 EmONC facilities, of which 31 were comprehensive EmONC facilities and 49 provided basic EmONC. In 2013, the coverage increased to 132 facilities, with 36 health units providing comprehensive EmONC and 96 providing basic EmONC.

In the National Health Strategic Plan and EmONC Improvement Plan 2010-2015 the government has made a commitment to ensure there are 180 operational EmONC facilities by 2015. Professor Tung Rathavy, the Director of the NMCHC commented that EmONC facilities have dramatically saved the lives of thousands of mothers and babies, in particular hard-to-reach women.

In the past decade, Cambodia has made impressive achievements in reducing maternal and child mortality. The number of skilled deliveries by midwives and institutional deliveries has remarkably increased. To continue with this momentum, investment in health service quality remains a priority.

In 2013, 84% of all births were delivered by skilled midwives. In 2014 alone, 362 midwives will receive training in basic EmONC through either 4 fragmented short courses or one month-long course. Since 2010, 898 midwives have been trained under this program.



Kim Thavy, 23 years old and her first newborn girl receive post-partum care from skilled birth attendants in the delivery room of Choeng Prey district hospital of Kampong Cham province.

Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

There is no doubt that providing modern family planning and maternal and newborn health services for all women saves lives. EmONC is an essential component of these services, which in Southeast Asia can save up to one million lives annually, and cut up to three-fourths of maternal deaths and one-half of newborn deaths (Guttmacher Institute & UNFPA, 2009). UNFPA supports the accelerated efforts of Cambodia's Fast Track Initiative Road Map 2010-2015 and EmONC Improvement Plan 2010-2015, to ensure that components of reproductive, maternal, and newborn health that are critical for saving lives are addressed. Ultimately, without the dedication of midwives and doctors, achieving Cambodia's goals to reach MDG 5 would be forgone.



Midwives demonstrate delivery skills during their exit exam, under observation from a specialist.

Photo: UNFPA Cambodia



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