

Integrated Management of Pregnancy and Childbirth

Obstetric Fistula

Guiding principles for clinical management
and programme development



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Preface

Despite its devastating impact on the lives of girls and women, obstetric fistula is still largely neglected in the developing world. It has remained a ‘hidden’ condition, because it affects some of the most marginalized members of the population—poor, young, often illiterate girls and women in remote regions of the world.

On a global scale, the continued incidence of obstetric fistula in low-resource settings is one of the most visible indicators of the enormous gaps in maternal health care between the developed and developing world. Obstetric fistula still exists because health care systems fail to provide accessible, quality maternal health care, including family planning, skilled birth attendance, basic and emergency obstetric care, and affordable treatment of fistula. In addition, social systems are failing to provide a safety net for girls and women.

Thankfully, fistula has recently begun to gain international attention. Efforts to prevent and treat fistula have, until now, been primarily conducted by dedicated individuals who have worked with very limited political, financial or institutional support. Now, however, there is a growing global momentum to reduce drastically the incidence of obstetric fistula. Today, everyone working in reproductive and maternal health has the opportunity to make changes that will turn despair into hope, and restore dignity to the millions of girls and women living in shame and poverty.

No woman should have to endure a condition which is both preventable and treatable. Our long-term goal should be to make fistula as rare a problem in the developing world as it is in the developed world. I hope this manual on fistula prevention and management will promote increased coverage of the recommended interventions, and become an integral part of the international Campaign to End Fistula.

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