



‘Midwives key in the fight against maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality’

- FIGO supports International Day of the Midwife (5 May 2013)

International Day of the Midwife - held on 5 May each year - was originally launched by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) in 1992 as a campaigning day on which to raise awareness of midwifery and to highlight the importance of midwives’ work worldwide.

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) - the only global organisation representing gynecologists and obstetricians, with member associations in 125 countries/territories - strongly believes that there are excellent reasons for obstetricians and gynecologists to collaborate closely with midwives to help strengthen midwifery.

In 2013, the Day’s theme will continue to be: ‘The World Needs Midwives Now More than Ever’, with the sub theme ‘Midwives Save Lives’. As the 2015 deadline for realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, these themes are of critical importance, particularly with reference to MDGs 4 and 5, ‘Reduce Child Mortality’ and ‘Improve Maternal Health’ respectively.

FIGO President, Professor Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, said: ‘There continues to be an urgent global need for midwives. They are truly invaluable, multi-faceted healthcare professionals. Not only do they care for women during pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period, and help to manage complications arising from these, they can offer general healthcare information in areas such as reproductive health, family planning and immunisations, as well as assisting women with breastfeeding and providing newborn care. They are also able to refer women and newborns for higher level care should it be needed. In essence, they are an absolutely essential part of the world’s defence against maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity.

‘Global figures are still extremely high - daily, approximately 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, with 99 per cent of all deaths occurring in developing countries. It is well known that providing specialist care before, during and after childbirth can help save lives - properly trained and supported midwives can make all the difference.’

In 2011, FIGO was involved in the launch of a landmark publication - 'The State of the World's Midwifery Report 2011' - launched at the International Confederation of Midwives' Triennial Congress in Durban, that presented vital independent evidence to support the case that adequately educated and resourced midwives are crucial to the achievement of MDGs 4 and 5. The report found that up to 3.6 million lives could be saved each year in 38 of the countries surveyed, if an additional 112,000 more health workers with midwifery skills were active in their communities, backed up by functioning healthcare systems.

Professor Arulkumaran continued: 'FIGO encourages its member societies to collaborate with midwifery associations - partnerships between health professional organisations (HPOs) and midwives can produce effective professional results through complementary professional strengths, effective networking, and through encouraging sustainability.'

'Education, training and capacity building are major areas within FIGO's work. Obstetricians and gynecologists at national and international levels have been greatly involved in the institution, scaling up and upgrading of levels of midwifery education. There is a great need in many low- and middle-resource countries for the implementation and upgrading of midwifery education, with the aim of increasing quantity and improving quality.'

He added: 'For example, the FIGO LOGIC (**L**eadership in **O**bstetrics and **G**ynecology for **I**mpact and **C**hange) Initiative in Maternal and Newborn Health, funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, enables FIGO to help improve the lives and health of women and newborns in low- and middle-resource countries with high maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, especially underserved populations. Midwifery associations in all of the Initiative's countries - Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, India and Nepal - are actively involved with this project.'

Professor Arulkumaran ended: 'After the successful first global Midwifery Symposium in Washington, 2010, FIGO is now actively involved in preparations for a second Symposium, to be held in Kuala Lumpur later this month, involving the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), ICM, Jhpiego and other key partners.'

'This event is a huge opportunity for all stakeholders to renew their commitments towards midwifery and to ensure that there is a continued push for increased global advocacy on these vital issues.'

Sources/useful links

<http://www.internationalmidwives.org/events/>
<http://www.unfpa.org/sowmy/report/home.html>
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/index.html>
<http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/mothers/pid/4384>

'Prescribe a midwife' and improve the health of pregnant women and their babies

<http://www.figo.org/files/figo-corp/120504%20ICM%20FIGO%20IDM%20statement.pdf>

In 2009, FIGO joined forces to sign a global open letter to G8 leaders on the need for midwives

<http://www.figo.org/news/maternal-mortality-campaign-letter-signed-figo-presented-g8-leaders>