

Nepal: Community Partnerships

Directions

Use this information to answer questions posed on Handout 4, page 2.

The Challenge: Providing Health Care

In Nepal, mountainous terrain, difficult weather conditions, and the scarcity of roads are obstacles for rural families in need of maternal or neonatal care. In regions where a single footpath winding its way through the mountains is all that connects one village to the next, women typically give birth at home, without the assistance of a nurse, doctor, or midwife. Only 19 percent of all deliveries in Nepal are aided by a skilled birth attendant.

Less than half of Nepal's population has access to all-weather roads, making it difficult for up to 95 percent of mothers and newborns to have access to modern health care facilities. For many Nepalese parents, it takes several days to reach a health care center. The expense of travel can be a deterrent for poor families. For those in need of emergency obstetric care, this geographic divide is far too often a death sentence for mother and child.

Community Health Volunteers: A Promising Solution

Community partnerships can prove invaluable in reaching women and children, providing outreach services to monitor their health, educate mothers about proper nutrition and hygiene for themselves and their children, and identify problems that require facility-based treatment. Community partnerships not only broaden access to services and facilitate closer contact between health workers and remote communities through home visits, they also encourage behavioral changes — such as exclusive breastfeeding, regular hand washing or, where necessary, sleeping under insecticide-treated nets to prevent malaria.

Community health workers in Nepal have collaborated with skilled medical personnel for decades to provide care to mothers, newborns, and children. Launched in 1988 by the Nepalese Government with support from UNICEF and other partners, the Female Community Health Volunteer Program boasts nearly 50,000 women throughout the country who have been trained to provide key services and interventions for pregnant women and children. Known throughout Nepal as pillars of the health system, these volunteers provide services such as vitamin A supplementation, distribution of deworming tablets, treatment of diarrhea and pneumonia, and support of polio and measles immunization campaigns at the community level. Largely thanks to their efforts, Nepal has succeeded in reducing child mortality by two-thirds in the past 15 years.

Caring for Newborns

By contrast, neonatal death rates have not fallen as dramatically. Many newborns born at home are lost due to hypothermia, asphyxia, complications resulting from low birthweight, and infection. To combat this problem the Government of Nepal, together with UNICEF and partners, has introduced a newborn care package component to the community health partnership, enabling a series of interventions to drastically reduce neonatal mortality. By providing services during home deliveries such as proper wiping and wrapping of the baby, encouraging skin-to-skin contact to prevent hypothermia and afterbirth asphyxia, and monitoring for severe infections, community health workers can prevent 67 percent of all neonatal deaths, experts estimate.

Directions

Read the following excerpted statements from the “Nepal: Community Partnerships” section on the previous page and above and answer the questions below. Use information both from Handout 4 and the *Youth Report 2009*.

Only 19 percent of all deliveries in Nepal are aided by a skilled birth attendant.

Question: What are some of the geographical and economic conditions making it difficult for Nepali women to receive care?

Community partnerships can prove invaluable in reaching women and children.

Question: How do community partnerships broaden access to services?

Question: What positive behavioral changes are encouraged through community partnerships?

The Female Community Health Volunteer Program has succeeded in reducing child mortality by two-thirds in the past 15 years.

Question: What is the Female Community Health Volunteer Program?

Question: What services do they provide?

Question: Why do you think the program has been so successful?

Neonatal deaths have not fallen as dramatically as child mortality has.

Question: What are some of the factors preventing a decrease in neonatal mortality?

Question: What are the causes of newborn deaths?

Experts estimate that community workers can prevent 67 percent of all neonatal deaths.

Question: What additional components need to be added to the services provided by community health volunteers in order to prevent neonatal deaths?