



EVERY
MOTHER
COUNTS

SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

Topic Overview



In addition to ensuring there are skilled providers to help pregnant women and making sure that women have a way to reach those providers, it is critically important that basic equipment and supplies are available and usable so healthcare workers can save lives.

Hospitals and clinics all over the developing world lack even the most basic equipment like gloves, gauze, soap and bandages. More advanced supplies like sterilized surgical equipment, lifesaving medications, IV fluids and blood for transfusions are nonexistent. Even in places where equipment is available, lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity and basic water and sanitation services can leave it un-usable.

Lack of supplies also creates conditions that make it difficult for healthcare professionals to provide care as they were trained to do. Coupled with the frustration of delivering sub-standard care, these conditions are the reasons most frequently cited by doctors and nurses for leaving rural postings for urban areas or developed countries.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SUPPLY & EQUIPMENT BARRIERS?

Lack of Infrastructure – Buildings & Utilities



In order to provide care, health professionals need basic, stable buildings to operate as clinics, birth centers and hospitals. Facilities are few and far between in many developing countries, posing challenges to laboring women who are trying to reach care. Even when women can reach healthcare facilities, they may not have the basic utilities needed to provide care. Over 1.2 billion people¹ - 20% of the world's population - still live without access to electricity. Almost all live in developing countries, including about 550 million in Africa, and over 400 million in India. Lack of reliable electricity means hospitals may not have lights, refrigeration, anesthesia and other essential services required to meet women's medical needs and provide 24-hour emergency care. This inhibits providers' ability to assess and care for patients, for example for hemorrhage during nighttime deliveries or for babies with breathing difficulties. It means patients who need surgery must wait until electricity is available or transfer to a facility that has power. Surgical equipment can't be sterilized properly, blood can't be refrigerated, stored and warmed for transfusions and medications can't be stored at proper temperatures. In addition, 345 million² lack access to basic water and sanitation services. Lack of water and sanitation facilities prevents providers from observing standards of asepsis required to prevent infections.

Lack of Medicines & Equipment



Many of the conditions that are potentially life threatening during pregnancy and childbirth can be prevented or easily treated when providers and patients have access to basic medications and/or the skills and supplies to perform basic medical procedures. For example, infections can be *prevented* when providers have access to soap, gloves and sterilization equipment and *treated* with access to antibiotics. Hemorrhage can be treated with medications like Pitocin and methergine and hypertensive disorders with diuretics and antiseizure medications. Without these medications and the equipment to administer them properly, women don't receive the treatment they need to save their lives.

Lack of Communication Devices



Many medical crises can be averted with a simple phone call. A traditional birth attendant can be alerted to a mother in labor, a midwife that a patient needs her help and a doctor that he has a patient on the way who's in trouble. Patient consultations can be made over the phone or through Skype when connectivity exists and providers can get a second opinion or consult with a specialist. If that cell phone doesn't exist however, or more likely, can't be charged, those lifesaving phone calls aren't made.

Birth & Baby Care Supplies



Because the soap, clean plastic liner, sterile gloves, feminine hygiene pads, cord clamp equipment and other basic supplies women need to ensure a safe, hygienic birth are often unavailable at birth centers and hospitals, women are expected to provide or pay for their own. While many women can purchase the supplies they need, many others have no money to make purchases or their markets have no supplies available. This prevents women from utilizing healthcare facilities and bars them from the most basic means of ensuring a safe, clean birth.

In addition to lacking medically necessary supplies, for some women it's a lack of baby care supplies that stands in the way of a mother and healthcare. Some families can't afford a clean new wrap to bring the baby home in and a mother's embarrassment about bringing something for her baby that's old or worn might prevent her from seeking out a provider and a facility where her lack of supplies will be on display.

Reproductive Health Supplies



More than 200 million³ women want to use contraception but are unable to because of lack of access to healthcare or because no medications or devices are available. Without access to safe, reliable contraception, too many mothers simply have no choice in the number and spacing of pregnancies they'll have. Too many young girls and teenagers are placed at risk for serious complications. About 16 million girls⁴ become pregnant every year, and pregnancy and childbirth-related complications are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 years old.

In many developing countries, feminine hygiene products are unavailable or nonexistent. Instead, women use rags or old clothes to absorb menstrual or post-delivery blood. For women who've recently delivered a baby, a lack of clean hygiene products can increase risks for post-natal infections.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE ACCESS TO SUPPLIES?



While some of these challenges—such as providing electricity—seem very large, there are ways to address these gaps in basic supplies and even infrastructure that can be scaled up to save lives. That’s what we’re working on in Malawi Haiti and Indonesia. Our investments are relatively small, but they’re already making a big difference to the women and healthcare providers who access these facilities. We’ve identified several ways to improve access to supplies that are sustainable, scalable and already improving facilities. Every Mother Counts is currently working to address some of these.

Refurbish or Build Appropriate Structures to Support Maternal Health Services



By upgrading or building new structures capable of providing safe, high-quality healthcare, women and their families have easier access to the care they need and healthcare providers are more capable and willing to provide services. For example, Mirebalais, a new hospital built in Haiti after the earthquake now provides care for as many as 500 patients per day including high-quality midwife-centered care for obstetric patients. In addition, this hospital acts as a teaching facility that's increasing capacity for nurses, midwives and doctors who will work throughout Haiti.

Outfitting facilities with reliable, sustainable electricity, plumbing, clean water and ventilation increases quality of care, patient willingness to access care and provider willingness and ability to provide care. A rundown building in the Saltadere region of Haiti (where women have limited or no access to prenatal care or obstetric services), is being upgraded with solar powered electricity, water and sanitation in addition to structural and cosmetic repairs. The new facility will function as a birth center that will be staffed by midwives.

Provide Technological Devices needed for Maternal Health including Dopplers, Ultrasound & Surgical Equipment



Having access to appropriate medical and technological devices to assess, diagnosis, treat and document care plus the training and repair capabilities needed to operate and maintain devices increases quality of care delivery and utilization. It's essential these devices are functional and useful for a facility's purposes and that training and access to repair services be available. One example of an organization making a technological difference is We Care Solar. They're providing hospitals and clinics in many developing countries with "solar suitcases," outfitted with solar panels that will provide power for years. EMC is supporting the expansion of solar suitcases to 40 rural clinics in Malawi. Instead of health workers using candles, flashlights, and cell phone lights to facilitate nighttime births and obstetric emergencies, they now have light to work by. In addition, they're provided with headlamps, Dopplers and the training to operate equipment. Coupled with the ability to charge medical equipment and cell phones for referrals, the Solar Suitcase will make a significant difference in providing electricity with the potential to save lives.

Provide Basic Medical Supplies & Equipment



Having access to basic medical supplies and equipment increases quality of care, reduces spread of disease, promotes healing and increases patient safety and provider satisfaction. Each safe birth should be equipped with basic supplies such as gloves, soap, disinfectant, gauze, cord clamps or sutures, scissors, a sterile barrier and other supplies mothers and babies need to ensure a safe birth.

When women have access to basic supplies for a clean, safe birth at little to no cost, they're more likely to utilize safe birth facilities and to survive their births. In some instances, these supplies can be purchased or provided locally within a woman's community. In other cases though, the products she needs are unavailable or the woman may not have money to purchase them. In those cases, donated birth kits like our Every Mother Kits provide women the supplies they need plus valuable incentives to give birth in safe facilities with trained providers instead of at home.

Provide Basic Baby Care Supplies, including Blankets & Diapers



When mothers have access to free or low-cost newborn care supplies, their babies are more likely to survive their births and mothers are more likely to utilize safe birth facilities. As with birth kits, newborn supplies may be available within a woman's community, but when they're not, or she cannot afford to purchase them, donated supplies are an important measure for ensuring maternal and newborn safety.

Provide or Facilitate Access to Basic Medications needed for
Maternal Health & Reproductive Health



Having a reliable supply of medications to promote maternal and reproductive health, treat disease and pregnancy and childbirth-related complications and prevent unwanted pregnancies is proven to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity. Target 8e⁵ of the Millennium Development Goals acknowledged the need to improve the availability of affordable medicines for the world's poor. The Lifesaving Commodities⁶ identify thirteen life-saving commodities that, if more widely accessed and properly used, could save the lives of more than 6 million women and children. Several countries have made substantial progress towards increasing access to essential medicines and treatments to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, (all contributors to maternal mortality) but access to essential medicines to treat maternal health issues and provide contraception in developing countries is not yet adequate.

Provide Mobile Technology & Cell Phones to Help Facilitate Communication during Pregnancy & Childbirth



Several programs are using new technologies and mobile phones to address transport and telephone consult issues in maternal health. For example, healthcare workers are using text messaging to provide prenatal education and healthcare to women in rural areas during their pregnancies. Cell phones are also being used to improve access to transportation during home deliveries in the event of a complication. One such program in Tanzania is experimenting with the use of cell phones to facilitate the electronic transfer of funds to taxi drivers when cash is not available. In addition, cell phones and mobile devices are providing a way for rural birth attendants and midwives at health clinics to connect with physicians at regional and urban facilities for clinical advice and referrals. Doctors are tele-consulting with patients, healthcare providers and specialists to improve access to the best medical care possible.

Resources:

1. The World Bank, Energy, The Facts
2. Water.org
3. UNFPA Reproductive Health, Ensuring That Every Pregnancy Is Wanted
4. World Health Organization, Adolescent Health
5. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013
6. Every Woman Every Child, Life-Saving Commodities