

Press Release

June 2012

Global collaboration aims to improve mother and newborn health

Researchers from across the world have joined forces to improve the quality of midwifery care and reduce maternal, newborn and infant mortality.

This global collaboration, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is examining key areas of reproductive, maternal and newborn care that are within the scope of midwifery services. The aim is to collate and disseminate the global evidence to assist national decision-making and improve midwifery services.

The work will involve an international team of 35 researchers and in partnership with *The Lancet* will culminate in a special series on midwifery in May/June 2013.

Professor Mary Renfrew, from the University of York's Mother and Infant Research Unit in the Department of Health Sciences, will lead the project as the Principal Investigator. Petra ten Hoop-Bender of the Instituto de Cooperación Social Integrare in Barcelona will coordinate the series and lead the communications work.

Professor Renfrew said: "The goal of this historic effort is to increase the evidence available to guide decision-making on midwifery and to promote action on developing midwifery services at scale, thereby improving the health of mothers, newborns and infants."

Dr Luc de Bernis, UNFPA added: "Our work will have an impact on country level action, budget decisions and health system development. Policy guidance, based on the evidence generated by the series, will improve the quality and coverage of midwifery services as well as increase the access to, and uptake of, these services."

The programme will be steered by an Executive Group that includes the University of York, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the White Ribbon Alliance, ICS Integrare, the University of Southampton, Yale University and the University of Technology, Sydney.

The evidence will be collated by a team of technical experts including health systems and health workforce analysts, epidemiologists, demographers, statisticians, health economists and specialist midwifery researchers. They will look at the proven impact of midwifery and health systems interventions, drawing examples from low-, middle- and high-income countries.

Petra ten Hoop-Bender, the Series Coordinator, explained that "this Lancet Series is focused on midwifery services that accompany and support women throughout their childbearing years. Strengthening midwifery provides a proven return on investment that yields high quality care, reduces maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, and improves population and economic outcomes, rather than a quick-fix solution that only addresses part of the continuum of care".

The Lancet Special Series on midwifery builds on a multi-agency collaboration in 2010-11 to report on 'The State of the World's Midwifery 2011'. Led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and managed by ICS Integrare, with the support of 30 international partners, the report looked at the critical issues in providing midwifery services in 58 countries with high maternal and newborn mortality.

This new research programme complements the United Nations Secretary-General's 'Every Woman, Every Child' campaign, and will contribute to national, regional and global actions to achieve Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6.

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- For more information on Instituto de Cooperación Social Integrare visit www.integrare.es
- For more information on Department of Health Sciences at the University of York visit www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences
- For further details on the 'State of the World's Midwifery 2011' report, visit www.stateoftheworldsmidwifery.org