

TASK for women's health in Africa

TASK – towards African solutions through knowledge for women's health – a UK-registered charity dedicated to improve the health of women in Africa, was launched at a seminar at the University of Cape Town held on 11 - 12 October 2007.

The aims of TASK are to promote and protect the physical and mental health of women on the African continent through affordable and sustainable provision of medical support, education and practical advice using locally generated ideas compatible with established culture. To achieve this, the charity will research and promote the use of modern communication technology for education and to provide practical support to workers in the field whose training and experience may be limited. The spread of mobile phone networks within the African continent offers a unique opportunity to improve communication and education for the prevention, early detection and effective treatment of the major causes of morbidity and mortality for women. The Western model for health care is not affordable for all the population of the African continent. It is intended to look for other models, including the use of non-medically qualified personnel for delivering health care after having been given appropriate training.

Among those present at the launch, which was held with the kind permission of Professor Zephne van der Spuy, were the trustees of TASK and experts from the Departments of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch and the Nelson Mandela Medical School of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The seminar included sessions on the delivery of maternity care in resource-poor settings, the leading causes of high levels of mortality and morbidity, and how these might be reduced by appropriate medical education employing distance learning techniques and modern communication technology. Abdul Kariem, marketing director of Vodacom South Africa, spoke on network coverage, the capabilities of picture technology and the use of restricted handsets for downloading educational information. This was followed by discussions on pilot projects to demonstrate the value of fieldworker support through mobile phone technology, identifying and commissioning suitable distance learning materials and transmitting them to appropriate target personnel, and the possibility of eventually rolling out these concepts throughout the African continent.

IHP launched

The International Health Partnership has been launched with the aim of improving the way that international agencies, donors and poor countries work together to develop and implement health plans.

The IHP aims to provide better coordination among donors, to focus on improving health systems as a whole and not just on individual diseases or issues, and to develop and support countries' own health plans. Its focus are the three Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that relate directly to health, i.e. reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combatting AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases.

Seven 'first-wave' countries in Africa and Asia have joined the

IHP, among them Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia. The IHP was launched by the UK government with donor countries including the UK, Norway, Germany, Canada, Italy, The Netherlands, France and Portugal.

Source: www.dfid.gov.uk

Initiative to improve mothers' access to safe blood

An initiative to improve the availability and use of safe blood to save the lives of women during and after childbirth was launched recently by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The initiative is intended as the beginning of a broader blood safety agenda and aims to work towards universal access to safe blood transfusion in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Blood transfusion has been identified as one of the eight key life-saving interventions in health care facilities providing emergency obstetric care. The Global Initiative on Safe Blood for Safe Motherhood aims to improve access to safe blood to manage pregnancy-related complications as part of a comprehensive approach to maternal care.

WHO will strengthen the capacity of blood banks and district hospitals for improving maternal health through the provision of technical support in the areas of voluntary blood donation, safe blood collection, quality-assured testing and best clinical practices. WHO also will train clinicians, nurses, technicians and other key health personnel at district level facilities.

Source: www.who.int