

ESSENTIAL SURGERY & THE GLOBAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

September 2015

IntraHealth International's vision is a world where everyone, everywhere has the health care they need to thrive. This includes care from a wide range of health workers, from frontline and community health workers to surgeons, anesthesiologists, obstetricians, and more. That's why we work to improve the performance of health workers and strengthen the systems in which they work. For more than 35 years, in 100 countries, we have worked with ministries of health and other partners to help countries build the health workforces they need, and to address the global deficit of more than 7 million health workers—including an insufficient and inequitably distributed surgical workforce.

Our approaches and tools support ministries of health and other partners to use health workforce data for decision-making, strengthen education in partnership with training institutions, motivate and retain health workers, improve performance and service delivery, and strengthen health systems. This is all part of our goal to ensure that all people have access to the care—including emergency and essential surgical care—they need. We work with countries to develop and adopt evidence-based policies and plans to strengthen surgical services, helping set norms and standards for surgical care, strengthening education and training programs, and helping build capacity for safe, high-quality surgical care.

In 2015, IntraHealth joined the G4Alliance Coalition as one of the many voices calling for greater investment in and attention to surgical care around the world.

A SURGICAL TEAM APPROACH

Making essential and emergency surgery universally available will require not just trained surgeons, but a team approach that recognizes and builds the skillsets and scopes of work of all health workers involved in making surgery possible.

Professionalizing under-recognized cadres: Physicians and nurses are two of the most recognized health professions in the world. They have global and national professional councils and associations, dedicated schools, representation in ministries of health, and opportunities for career development. But universal access to surgery will require new and under-recognized cadres: blood bank workers, ambulance drivers, emergency medical technicians, and logisticians. It will also take midlevel providers, such as surgical officers, clinical officers, nurse anesthetists, advanced practice surgical nurses, and optometrists.

IntraHealth develops frameworks to help countries professionalize under-recognized cadres, including organizing and motivating workers with opportunities for career development. We also provide technical assistance to help countries create and scale up new cadres of midlevel providers and design their surgical teams, and we are committed to expanding our work in this area.

Expanding scopes of practice: Global access to surgery will require expanded scopes of practice for many types of health workers. National policies and health facilities must support the kind of task-shifting and -sharing that would

allow, for example, nurses to prescribe antibiotics and analgesics, nursing assistants to administer injections, optometrists to drain abscesses, and advanced practice dental hygienists to perform basic extractions and suturing. All of these may require changes to preservice training and policies, or official lists of activities cadres can perform under their licenses. IntraHealth has expertise in advocating for and developing expanded scopes of practice in several countries—as well as in addressing the challenges that often accompany these changes.

PREGNANCY-RELATED EMERGENCY & ESSENTIAL SURGERY

Every day, 800 women die from complications of childbirth. But pregnancy-related morbidities are usually preventable with access to skilled health workers. IntraHealth develops policies, programs, and services to make high-quality maternal health care—including antenatal care, safe deliveries, and postnatal care—available to all.

We work with ministries of health and other partners to expand access to and use of skilled birth attendants, train health workers in basic and emergency obstetric and neonatal care, and mobilize communities to promote facility-based delivery. We advocate for and develop policies and programs to train health workers in the active management of the third stage of labor to prevent post-partum hemorrhages and to provide postabortion care services and cesarean sections, when necessary.

We also work to address obstetric fistula, a highly preventable and treatable condition that can occur during obstructed or prolonged labor. The infant is often stillborn in such cases, and the mother suffers debilitating results, including chronic incontinence, pain, and other disabilities. Two million women around the world live with fistula and up to 100,000 more develop the condition every year. In low-income countries such as Mali, where IntraHealth's fistula care work is currently focused, many women do not have access to the skilled health care that can prevent it, and may suffer with the condition for years. IntraHealth has developed a comprehensive approach to fistula care, which includes community mobilization, expanding access to skilled birth attendants, training *local* surgeons in fistula repair surgery, and ensuring that women receive holistic care before and after surgery.

GENDER EQUALITY

Surgery is one of the least gender-integrated medical specialties in the world. Globally, more than 70% of surgeons are men. Women face many cultural barriers to surgical careers, including the misconceptions that women cannot invest the years of training needed, work demanding hours, or cope with the high-pressure environment in which many surgeries are performed. IntraHealth develops tools and approaches to prevent gender discrimination in the health workforce and advance the careers of female health workers, including those involved in surgical care.

CONSULTING SERVICES

Our experts offer state-of-the-art expertise through short- and medium-term consulting services agreements. Please contact us for more information.

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