



Australian College of Neonatal Nurses Inc.

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ACNN Low Resource Countries Special Interest Group

One of the primary causes of mortality in the newborn period is the failure of neonatal care, partly due to the lack of skilled birth attendants to deliver appropriate resuscitation and care and skilled nurses to care for sick and small newborns at birth. Birth asphyxia, that is the inability to breathe immediately after delivery, is one of three causes accounting for over 80% of newborn mortality globally. The World Health Organization estimates that one million babies die each year from birth asphyxia. In addition of the 10 million babies do not breathe immediately at birth, 6 million will require basic neonatal resuscitation (bag and mask ventilation), of which many will respond.

The Australian College of Neonatal Nurses (ACNN) has formed a special interest group, the Low Resource Countries Special Interest Group (LRC SIG). The LRC SIGs primary goal is to assist low resource countries in our region in reducing newborn (from birth until 28 days of life) mortality as part of the Every Newborn Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which all 193 countries have signed up to.

The LRC SIG commenced volunteering education and training activities in Australia's closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, in October 2014, and visits twice each year. The resuscitation training concentrates on 'The Golden Minute'. With a few simple steps taken in the first minute after birth, newborns who struggle to breathe are given a much better start in life. The simple steps in the Helping Babies Breathe curriculum have proven to save many lives in newborns who struggle to breathe at birth. To date we have had an unfathomable 472 people attend our HBB training held in Goroka and its surrounding regions. Participants have included nurses, midwives, student nurses, student midwives, village birth attendants, community health workers, village women elders, midwifery educators and nursing educators.

What is evident is that those working with newborns are very keen to learn and have access to resources that will assist them. We enjoy sharing not only resuscitation training but on many aspects of maternal and newborn care including research, quality improvement and the Global agenda for women, adolescent and newborn health. It has been a wonderful opportunity to also learn from those who work in PNG in regards to many health aspects including cup-feeding and health issues not often seen in Australia. We have had the opportunity to collaborate with Colleagues working in Goroka to present at International conferences.

A highlight is the opportunity we have had to provide education and training to those who volunteer and work in rural and remote areas of PNG. Sometimes it is difficult for labouring women to access or reach a medical facility to deliver their baby. Thus providing training to the volunteer birth attendants is essential if women who live in remote areas are to receive any assistance during childbirth. We were lucky enough to meet and train 4 village women elders from a remote village, Ikundi, in the Suowi Valley. Access to this region is only by plane and the closest community health centre is 3 days walk. These women were at Goroka Hospital to participate in a 2 week course to provide them with some knowledge on maternal and child health, including birthing. They spoke to us through 2 interpreters, one that translated from their village dialect into Pigeon and the other from Pigeon to English. At the request of the women, they left our training with a bag full of resus masks, suction penguins and bunny rugs. It is incredible to see these women practice drying,

suctioning and delivering mask to mouth or mouth to mouth until they achieved adequate ventilation. They are determined to learn and to be able to undertake simple measures that help babies breathe. It is one of the best experiences we get to share.

The every newborn action plan sets out a vision of a world in which there are no preventable deaths of newborns or stillbirths, where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth celebrated and women, babies and children survive, thrive and reach their full potential. Nearly 3 million lives could be saved each year through quality care around the time of birth and special care for sick and small newborns. ACNN is proud and humbled to be working with health professionals in other countries to work towards improving the quality of care for newborns and their families.

ACNN is a national, not-for-profit organisation that serves as the peak professional body for neonatal nurses in all states of Australia, who are committed to the promotion of excellence in the care of neonates and their families throughout Australasia and worldwide by providing education and training. Members of the LRC SIG who provide the training, do so at their own expense and take leave from work for the visits.



Images courtesy of ACNN: Community Health Workers, Nurses & Midwives at Eastern Highlands Provincial Hospital (PNG) who have undergone the “Helping Babies Breathe” training with the ACNN team.