

LETTER TO EDITOR

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Maternal and Perinatal Health Challenges in Pakistan

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Dear Editor,

Maternal and perinatal mortality have appeared a huge challenge in the health care setting of developing countries.

[1] Considering the importance of this issue, in 1987 maternal and perinatal health is considered a priority in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Regrettably, Pakistan is still struggling to meet to the MDGs goal of maternal and child health by 2015. A target goal of minimizing the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) to 100 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015 was set by Pakistan's Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Program.

[2] Despite significant improvements over the past 20 years, Pakistan's ranking for MMR had dropped from 147th last year to 149 and infant and neonatal mortality is towards the bottom as per UNICEF. [3] To achieve the target of 100 MMR and below Pakistan have a long way to go. Lower spending on health care, lack of maternal care facilities in rural area, early marriages, multiple gestations, malnutrition, lack of standard or appropriate maternal/antenatal care services and low birth weight are some of the main factors contributing to higher maternal and neonatal mortality. Pakistan has the third highest rate of infant mortality in the world. In 2013, The perinatal mortality rate (PMR) per 1000 births was estimated to be 75. [4] Moreover, lower monthly income and the perception that prenatal care is unnecessary because its costly led to the refusal of 1/3rd of expecting mothers in Pakistan. In addition, to date about 51.6% of the deliveries are performed at home, of whom about 12.5% of the deliveries are performed by the non-trained personnel's and 39.7% receive no postnatal care and guidance about the child and maternal care. Although government has

set aside Rs. 24.5 billion as 2016-2017 Health budget for Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn & Child Health (RMNCH) and Nutrition Programme but unfortunately it is still on papers. In addition, the situation of the government sector healthcare setups are still lacking the basic facilities, modern equipment and adequate working staff. On top of these increasing cost of healthcare has also have a vital role in limiting health access to the public. It is relevant to comment here that prices of a number of life-saving drugs have been increased and the government has announced nothing in the budget to make them affordable for poor public. [5] Several deaths have been reported due to affordability issues. A baby girl died during birth in a rickshaw after the pregnant mother was denied admission in gynecology ward in Civil Hospital Gujranwala as she was not able to bear the expenses. [6] Keeping in view this situation of material and neonatal services, Pakistan in the absence of a robust health care system will face many challenges to meet the MGDs to minimize MMR. Improvement of existing infrastructure and establishing new health care facilities will be one of the first line measure to ensure the decline in maternal and perinatal mortality rates.

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