

# FOREWORD

As we approach the millenium it is useful to take stock of the progress and problems within the health sectors of developing countries. For many, significant progress has been achieved in promoting immunisation and other preventive programmes; in reducing childhood mortality; and in raising life expectancy for adults. But major problems remain. One of the highest health priorities for international agencies, especially those with a primary focus on poverty alleviation, is to help countries achieve further declines in infant mortality, and to improve reproductive health. The British Government Department for International Development which supported the Kathmandu workshop which stimulated the production of this book is committed to helping countries reduce their infant and child mortality rates by two-thirds by the year 2015. They are committed also to help reduce the huge risks to millions of women from a pregnancy-related illness or death. In some countries, women may face a one in 25 lifetime risk of a maternal death — up to 100 times greater than women in industrialised countries.

Safer Motherhood Programmes (of which newborn care is an integral part) are therefore one of the highest investment priorities, but such programmes are often difficult to implement and monitor. It is challenging enough to ensure good emergency obstetric care services at district level linked to an active, effective and mother-friendly primary care referral system. But further problems are faced in reforming health sector management, improving the socio-economic and educational status of women, changing cultural practices which may limit demand for services when they are needed, and in demonstrating the success of Safer Motherhood Programmes in terms of improved health outcomes.

A crucial component is in ensuring that birth does not end in a neonatal death. Such an outcome is still common, represents a tragedy for the family,

and exposes the mother to the additional risk of another pregnancy in the near future. Essential newborn care is therefore an integral component of a Safer Motherhood programme, and neonatal outcome one important indicator of success.

Anthony Costello and Dharma Manandhar have collated an extremely important set of papers, mostly from authors working in the south, which provide evidence, experience and ideas for improving newborn care within the framework of Safer Motherhood. The book should be essential reading for professionals working in this area, and I hope many newborn infants will benefit as a result.

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