

# Free Methodist Health Fellowship Newsletter February 2024

## Saving the Lives of Mothers and Babies

BY NORMAN WETTERAU, MD AND LWABANYA MARX, MD



Image courtesy of Unsplash

The American Church is concerned about saving the lives of pregnant mothers, babies, and preventing neonatal deaths by discouraging abortions. In central Africa, many newborns die, and mothers die from childbirth often.

This article is an introduction to the issue of neonatal deaths, with an additional article that will follow later this year. There is much development in this area, including in some of our Free Methodist hospitals and clinics overseas. We welcome comments and additional writers.

**MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO (MODELED ESTIMATE, PER 100,000 LIVE BIRTHS)**

Data Courtesy of: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and UNDESA/Population Division. Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2020. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2023

Worldwide, the maternal mortality ratio was 339 per 100,000 births in 2000, however currently the ratio is 223 per 100,000. In many developed countries the rate is under 20. In Canada, it is 11. The rates for 4 countries where we have Free Methodist Hospitals are: Rwanda 259, Haiti 350, Burundi 494 , and Democratic Republic of Congo; 547. These are the incidences of mothers dying from Childbirth. Rates for infant death will be presented later next year.

The Gates Foundation is making this a major project, and they published a report Sept 12, 2023 This report can be downloaded from the internet and presents several initiatives. Their report had seven recommendations:

1. A bundle of interventions that can reduce postpartum hemorrhage, the No. 1 cause of maternal death, by 60% for less than \$1 per package
2. Bifidobacteria (B. Infantis), a new probiotic supplement that, when given to an infant alongside breastmilk, combats malnutrition—one of the leading causes of newborn deaths
3. Multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) that boost survival rates for babies by helping replete nutrient stores in pregnant women and ensuring those vital nutrients are transferred to the baby
4. A new one-time infusion of IV iron for women that replenishes iron reserves during pregnancy, protecting against and treating anemia, a condition that is both a cause and effect of postpartum hemorrhage and affects almost 37% of pregnant women
5. Antenatal corticosteroids (ACS), which are given to women who will give birth prematurely to accelerate fetal lung growth, providing several weeks of maturation in just a few days
6. Azithromycin, which reduces maternal infections during pregnancy and prevents infections from spiraling into sepsis—the cause of 23% of maternal deaths in the United States—and reduces mortality when given to infants in high-mortality settings.
7. An AI-enabled portable ultrasound that empowers nurses and midwives to monitor high-risk pregnancies in low-resource settings to ensure that risks are diagnosed and addressed early

In the Nundu area of Eastern Congo most deliveries are being done by midwives and in some cases by totally untrained midwives. At-risk mothers are supposed to be referred to our hospital where there are physicians. The first problem is lack of trained midwives, but on

the positive side, our nursing school there is training midwives and wants to enlarge their student body and building to make midwife training a major goal of the school.

Secondly, Dr. Marx has already instituted a program where midwives can call by cell phone the hospital to discuss cases and get telephone consultations. For this publication he has sent the report, included below. In our next issue he can share more and we can provide more details on the midwife school.

## **MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH IN CONGO**

by: Lwabanya Marx MD

The Deaconess Nundu Hospital, a free Methodist Facility is actively involved in the effort to provide quality care to the underprivileged community in the rural area of Nundu, Eastern Congo.

In the last five years, more effort has been dedicated to improving maternal and newborn health care. This includes and not limited to the following:

Setting up a neonatal intensive care unit, with basic equipment to provide quality health care, including two incubators, CPAP, Oxygen, blue light, radiant warmers, Infusion pumps and monitors, etc.

Short training of general nurses to provide basic neonatal care,

Short training of general practitioner doctors and nurses in comprehensive emergency obstetrics and neonatal care.

Despite the above-mentioned effort maternal and newborn mortality has been oscillating and haven't yet been close to the SDG -3.

To address that situation, several new interventions has been initiated at Deaconess Nundu Hospital in collaboration with multiple partner organizations:

**Mobile Clinic**, two mobile nurses are able to organize field trip in the community and reach out mothers and infant facing financial barriers, they perform clinical assessment and provide medications for common conditions like malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, etc Children found in critical ill condition are immediately transferred to the Deaconess Nundu Hospital for appropriate care where all the care are provided for free because their bill are covered by patients care funds from CAHO.

**Community Health Workers (CHWs)**; one supervisor nurse from the Deaconess Nundu Hospital and 10 CHWs are actively involved in supporting served community to prevent common maternal and infant conditions by encouraging antenatal care visit, post-natal visit, sensitizing on hand hygiene, nutrition and contraceptive

methods. The Community Health Workers program helped identify several high-risk pregnancies and decisions were made on time.

**Master Trainer program:** as noted in many of our report late referral, poor knowledge of health providers at health centers especially in newborn resuscitation, management of common post-partum emergencies like PPH, etc. The Deaconess Nundu Hospital initiated a program to address the knowledge gap at the health centers in the Nundu health District. The model is assess-train- assess- re-train. The program is supported by the Gould Family Foundation and focus on helping baby breath, essential care of small babies, essential care of every baby and helping mothers survive.

The DRC government has also initiated free-of-charge health care to women delivering and newborn starting October 1st, 2023. This program is dedicated to easing the financial burden of maternal and sick newborn. We don't know yet what will be the next outcome.

## Nundu News Thanks Free Methodist Health Fellowship for Dr. Ebuela Mtee Baron's Scholarship

The following article was posted by Nundu News in thanks of the scholarship provided for Dr. Baren:

**NUNDU NEWS: November 20, 2023**

### **BARON SCHOLARSHIP THANKSGIVING**

**Thank you, Free Methodist Healthcare Fellowship, for providing a scholarship for Dr. Ebuela Mtee Baron** to pursue a residency in OB/GYN. Dr. Baron joined the staff of Deaconess Nundu Hospital as a general practitioner in January 2020. Before joining DNH, Dr. Baron completed his internship at "Hopital de Baraka" funded by the MSF-Hollande, for six months. After his training, he served at Fizi Hospital for nine months, and then joined, as the only doctor, a private clinic in Baraka (Polyclinique de Dieu).





Meeting with Dr. Baron August 2023

Dr. Baron holds a bachelor's degree in medicine from "Universite Officielle de Bukavu", completed in 2016. He holds a high school diploma in biochemistry, Institut de la Fraternite, Kigoma, Tanzania in 2009, completed while he was a refugee from the conflict in his home country DR Congo. He was born at the Deaconess Nundu Hospital in 1988.

On his arrival at Nundu from Baraka, he was assigned to the obstetrics-gynecologic service. While serving as a general practitioner with limited training he attended to many patients who required referral to a specialist. These patients would have to be transferred to Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu, more than 250 kilometers north of Nundu. Living away from their home village and traveling to the city was difficult, and sometimes even dangerous. During their journey their problem would often get worse, and some patients would even die.



Deaconess Nundu Hospital medical staff and church leaders, June visit 2022

Baron is happy for the opportunity to give back to his community. He is motivated by his desire to help a population which is suffering from very complex medical conditions. Seeing the need for additional training, he competed successfully with 57 doctors for one of 13 scholarships in a residency program at the University of Burundi in obstetrics-gynecology. However, he found that as a Congolese he was obliged to pay \$1500 per year tuition.

With limited resources available, Dr. Baron began his training in Bujumbura, November 2022, leaving his wife Anne Marie and daughter at Nundu. In February 2023 he and Anne celebrated two years of marriage as well as the first birthday of their only daughter Emilee.



Connie Ebuela November 12, 2023



Emilee, Dr. Baron, Anne Marie

The need for scholarship support came to our attention in August of this year while on our mission to the DR Congo. Though Dr. Baron had received support to pay his tuition fees for one year from his brother, he was without sufficient funds to provide the basic needs of his family. Anne was making a way for herself at Nundu by preparing meals for special events as well as taking on sewing projects. She also learned that she was pregnant with their second baby, due in November. The opportunity to support this couple with a scholarship was presented to the Free Methodist Healthcare Fellowship and approved. Thank you for your support.

The Baron family is now living in Bujumbura, Burundi. Their second daughter was born November 13 and was given the name Connie Ebuella. We are blessed to be in relationship with this beautiful family. Is your heart drawn to Africa? There are other opportunities to support worthy scholarship recipients as well as to continue support for the additional three years of Baron's residency. To give, go to [www.congohealth.org](http://www.congohealth.org).

## FMHF 2023 Retreat Recap: Renewal of the Mind and Trauma Informed Ministry

Doctors, nurses, chaplains and others gathered for our FMHF fall retreat on Oct 20-22. Our featured speaker, Robyn Florian, shared a wealth of theoretical, biblical and practical wisdom that churches can use to help promote healing of those suffering from past and current physical and emotional trauma.

Robyn graduated last May with a D.M. in Organizational Leadership from Asbury Theological Seminary. This was a culmination of a four-year season of study focused on how to help people hope through intensive, integrated soul care. She is available to do weekend workshops for churches. A full summary of the weekend talks would take many pages.

The quote on her first slide called us to our task:

“The world is in awe of the church [when] the church is in awe of God. When the church lives in awe of God, the kingdom breaks out into the world. When the kingdom breaks out into the world, the world begins to believe in God. When the world begins to believe in God, the

church receives them into the community.” This quote is from the sermon series *Wake Up Call with J.D. Walt*; “They Understood the Assignment, Acts 5:12-16”

In her presentation, she mentioned neuroplasticity, which explains why people can change. The gospel is something that can change the shame narrative. This is really what much of her talk is about. Our communities and churches are filled with people who have experienced emotional trauma, and a pastor and church that understands this can really help these people believe in God and come into the church community.

She talked about hope, healing and resilience. She provided some theological and practical ways that the church can help. She also discussed the theme: Renewal of the Mind, and Romans 12:2 .

For those who have suffered physical and emotional trauma, it will take more than a sermon or even a weekend retreat to truly heal. It will take an understanding, healing community, which is one of her major themes. How can a church become that? The Free Methodist Healthcare Fellowship encourages pastors and churches to learn more about these areas and become really healing communities. Feel free to contact Robyn or the Free Methodist Health Care Fellowship for further assistance.

## Trauma Informed Care Introduced at Nundu

BY LWABANYA MARX MD

### **THE FOLLOWING IS A NEWS ARTICLE FROM CONGO:**

#### **OUR HISTORY IN SOUTH KIVU**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The crisis is described to be one of the world’s deadliest, longest, unfortunately less spoken and happening for decades. It has resulted in massive internal displacement of populations without adequate assistance in many cases. At the same time the DRC is home for refugees from neighboring countries.

This evolving humanitarian disaster is largely silent on the global consciousness, yet the disastrous consequences are felt by all sectors of the population. The eastern part of the



country has been the most affected for years by repeated wars and conflicts, resulting in thousands of victims surviving with physical and emotional trauma. The health providers who work in this humanitarian context face many challenges, including poor salary payment contrasting with a massive overload of work while remaining largely untrained in trauma-informed care, unprepared to deal with patients' emotional stress, and unsupported in any endeavors they personally take on. Adverse effects linked to the instability in the region seriously impact the well-being of both caregivers and patients.

The Nundu Deaconess Hospital (Nundu Hospital), located in South Kivu, has been caring for thousands of Burundian refugees based in the Lusenda Camps since 2015. More recently, in 2020, additional waves of internally displaced people have arrived in the region seeking care, resulting from instability in the middle and high plateaus. Despite desperate needs for equitable healthcare, patients are often dissatisfied with the care they receive due to lack of staff training and support. A small team of international collaborators from the Atlantic Fellows program are seeking to address these issues with the project, "Hope, Healing, Home, Humanity: Strengthening Our Circle of Belonging"

## **THE PROGRAM**

A program training health care providers on Trauma aware / sensitive / Informed Care (TASIC) was initially developed for the Staff at NDH. However, due to the observed need in the Zone it was extended to all health providers of the health Zone including 22 health centers and 5 referral health centers and the NDH.

This training is conducted under the project: "Hope, Healing, Home, Humanity: Strengthening Our Circle of Belonging" with the aim to promote inclusive health care that improve people well-being both physical and mental for patient on one side including those in particular contexts (refugees, IDPS, etc) and health providers on the other.

A kick-off meeting at Nundu on September 1-6 brought together different stakeholders including local health officials, health providers, Community health workers, Civil society leaders, traditional healers, church leaders, local NGOs, etc these different groups gathered on table and shared their stories, perceptions, root causes of mental health problems in the Nundu community. The inputs from the groups led to the development of learning materials for health providers within five days. The participants recommended this training to be extended to their peers, and shared the commitment to make their work environment a better place for them and their patients.

Addendum regarding Dr. Lwabanya I. Marx

In April, Dr. Marx will be traveling to the United States, where he will be joining 3 other members in the Atlantic Fellows program. They will all be presenting in a major conference

at Duke University on April 8-10. He then plans to remain in the United States and will be speaking at the CAHO conference on April 26-27 at the Spring Arbor. During the last half of April, he will be available to speak in churches, at groups, or at one of our Free Methodist Universities. If interested, contact [normwetterau@aol.com](mailto:normwetterau@aol.com)