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MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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URGENT

United Nations
Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights

Subject: Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights: follow up to Council resolution 11/8, which was adopted by the Human Rights Council in September 2010

I am directed to refer to the above subject and transmit you the compilation of effective practices that Cyprus adopt to eliminate the maternal mortality and morbidity.

Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights
The Nursing Services of the Ministry of Health attribute great importance to the necessity of addressing high quality midwifery care in the health care system of Cyprus. It recognizes that pregnancy and childbirth are related to the causes of morbidity and mortality among women of reproductive age and that offering services which make motherhood safer is essential for women’s health and survival. Skilled attendants, midwives and obstetricians are responsible for providing midwifery care and are able to promote health, prevent, detect and manage major obstetric complications thus preventing maternal deaths. The high social-educational status of women in Cyprus offers them the ability to make informed decisions related to their own health. Further more access to skilled health professionals and services exists.
These circumstances also enables them to choose if, when and how often to have children.

The main aim of midwifery is to provide the highest quality of maternal and reproductive health care to women and their families. Pregnant women are supported by qualified professionals, midwives and obstetricians who attend them throughout their pregnancy birth and during the antenatal period. It aims to ensure that all mothers and babies receive high quality care. It offers equity of access to maternity services which increases the survival rates for all pregnant women taking into consideration that care and support provided for mothers and babies during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period has a significant effect both on mother’s and children’s health development. For optimum health and well being all women have access to health services, choice and control regarding the care they receive and continuity of support during their pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period.

**Action plan for the improvement of maternal and reproductive health**

1. **Access to family planning**
   - Family planning is offered by midwives in public hospitals and also by the Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA). This Association was founded in 1971 and it is a volunteer, non governmental and non profit organization.
   - Education on family planning issues is offered in antenatal classes organized by midwives in cooperation with health visitors and the CFPA.
   - All school students are informed through health visitors educational programs about the risks or unprotected sex and about the methods of protection and of unwanted pregnancies.

2. **Access to maternal quality care for pregnant women and childbirth**
   - Midwifery services are provided only in clinical environment either in the public or private sector thus the pregnant woman has no option for giving birth at home, at birth centers or anywhere else except from hospital.
   - Pregnant women receive maternal care from qualified midwives: on antenatal visits; on antenatal classes and during childbirth.
   - In the private sector care during antenatal, delivery and postnatal period is offered by a specialist. There is shortage of midwives in the private sector, and on many occasions care is provided by qualified nursing staff.
   - Although midwives promote normal birth, there is medical intervention from the specialists. The over-medicalization of birth in Cyprus with approximately Caesarian section rate 31.73% is one issue which may
have an impact on maternal mortality. Unfortunately, no research is available to reveal whether there is any relation between maternal mortality rate and the medicalization of birth.

- The pregnant woman has at least 10 antenatal visits with 2 ultrasound examinations, one in the first trimester and one in second trimester, which is in accordance of the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG5). (MDG5 aims the promotion of maternal health and the reduction by 3/4 of the maternal mortality rate, as well as the achievement of universal access to reproductive health)
- Informed choice on antenatal tests and screening are offered to women as routine part of the process of being pregnant in the event that women request or decline services or treatment their decision is respected.
- Midwives are able to prevent, detect and manage major obstetric complications such as signs of hemorrhage, puerperal infection, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy such as eclampsia, gestational diabetes and preexisting conditions such as anaemia, hepatitis, heart disease.
- Women with recurrent miscarriages are offered a referral to a specialist.
- There is easy access (free) for all women to use public maternity services but there are beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the taxation system according to the financial status of the woman.
- Women also have easy access to supportive, high quality maternity services, designed around their individual needs and those of their babies. Women are supported and encouraged by midwives to have as normal delivery as possible with medical interventions recommended to them only if they are of benefit to woman or their baby.
- Midwives and health visitors work in close cooperation in order to promote breast feeding and to ensure that the mother receives the optimum post natal care she needs and also that the parents are able to care for their child. Promoting breast feeding is a priority.

3. **Midwifery Education and Continuous professional development**

- The introduction of Midwifery Education, direct entry at University level like Nursing, will ensure the graduation of a small number of Midwives every academic year. This will, increase the number of midwives in Cyprus and achieve adequate staffing for both the public and the private sector. This will give women the opportunity to meet a midwife during antenatal care, childbirth and post natal period.
• With adequate numbers of midwives in Cyprus, the Ministry of Health will have the opportunity to promote the operation of Birth Centres, enabling women to choose for their birth. A Birth Centre ensures the natural birth, promotion of breast feeding as well as the reduction of the medicalisation of birth and maternal mortality rate.

• Continuous professional development will also empower midwives to encounter changes and new challenges such as domestic violence which is detrimental to women’s health.

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For Permanent Secretary