

Council of International Neonatal Nurses (COINN): A means to address infant mortality

The Council of International Neonatal Nurses (COINN) was formed over the last decade to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes. This is a complex area of health care, and prior to the development of COINN, there was no formal global mechanism for neonatal nurses to collaborate and assist one another.

Why is it important to have a formal mechanism, such as a professional organisation, that focuses on neonatal care? The global infant mortality rate is staggering. A recent report from the *Lancet Neonatal Survival Steering Team* estimates that about two million babies die within the first 24 hours of life and four million babies die within the neonatal period – the first 28 days of life – accounting for almost 40% of all childhood deaths globally¹.

In 2000, world leaders convened at the United Nations' Millennium Summit and established eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are aimed at improving the quality of life through improvements in gender equity, the environment, clean water, education, and health care. Although MDGs apply to all people, many are directed towards children, the most vulnerable patient population and the first to die when basic needs such as food, water, sanitation, and health care are lacking. Since so many of the MDGs have a direct and indirect effect on the quality of life during the early years, and because positive interventions in the first years of life make the biggest difference in a child's physical, intellectual, and emotional development, the MDGs are aimed at ensuring everyone's future by assisting children to reach their full potential.

In 2006, COINN was invited to attend a symposium at the UN that addressed MDG-4; the target for this MDG is that by 2015 there will be a two thirds reduction in the global mortality rates for children less than five years of age. While interventions can be implemented to prevent and treat many of the causes of infant and early childhood mortality and improve maternal health, it is essential that a community, home-based infrastructure is securely in place. This infrastructure is necessary so that all programmes and interventions are sensitive to cultural and communication needs of the community being served. Moreover, properly designed community-based infrastructures ensure that nurses are suitably trained and educated thereby enabling the best and most appropriate care possible to be delivered to patients.

COINN can make a difference in meeting the MDGs' targets through the use of internationally recognised leaders in neonatal nursing care who will:

1. Foster excellence in neonatal nursing
2. Promote the development of neonatal nursing as a recognised global specialty
3. Promote high standards of neonatal care
4. Enhance quality of care for our patients and families

5. Decrease health disparities

6. Improve healthcare outcomes.

The core values of COINN begin with excellence in neonatal care, practice, and education, focusing on culturally sensitive, compassionate family-centered care. Respecting differences while emphasising standards of care and education, COINN promotes evidence-based practice and provides educational resources and research opportunities that can improve outcomes in many areas of the world that normally do not have access to this level of professional leadership and guidance. Examples of such initiatives include assisting South Africa and India to start national neonatal nursing organisations and supporting South Africa's request to gain recognition of specialised neonatal nursing education.

Currently, COINN's membership includes nurses from over 50 countries. In addition, COINN is partnering with multiple national and international organisations, and is an active participant in national and international strategic planning and development of health policy designed to improve neonatal care. In addition, the University of Oklahoma World Health Organization (WHO) Affiliate Collaborating Center, a part of the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing's WHO Center, is also active in COINN initiatives.

At the sixth International Conference of Neonatal Nurses held in Delhi, India in September of 2007, COINN was formally recognised as the only international organisation that represents the global community of neonatal nurses and their organisational partners. The conference was attended by nurses, doctors and other therapists – often as a unit team – with many more countries being represented than at previous international meetings.

During the forum, COINN sponsored a one-day institute to solidify links and promote dialogue among nurse leaders from developed and developing countries. In addition, there was strategic planning aimed at determining how COINN can be most effective in disseminating evidence-based practice standards and guidelines, educational resources, and research opportunities. Holding the institute at the international conference increased access to experts in attendance from developed and developing countries, such as Australia, Iceland, Kenya, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, and United Kingdom.

COINN will co-sponsor the 2010 Conference with the South African Neonatal Nursing Association in Durban, South Africa.

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References

1. Lawn J.E., Cousens S., Zupan J. for the Lancet Neonatal Survival Steering Team. Neonatal Survival 1: 4 Million Neonatal Deaths: When? Where? Why? *Lancet* 2005; **365**(9462), 891-900.

For more information see www.coinnurses.org