



Every Newborn Counts

2019

Despite financial limitations and challenges resulting from the Israeli occupation, neonatal mortality in Palestine has dropped from 22 to 10.8 deaths per 1,000 births between 1991 and 2016. When compared to neighboring countries, however, the number of neonatal deaths in Palestine is still high. For example, the 2016 neonatal mortality rate in Lebanon was 5 per 1,000, and 6.2 per 1,000 in Turkey (World Bank 2016).

The financial burden of neonatal health in Palestine is very high. In 2016, there were 130,497 live births, of which 1,793 were transferred to neonatal intensive care units at an estimated cost of 10 million USD, 4.7% of the total national referral budget of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH). Additionally, many babies are born in private hospitals, incurring significant out-of-pocket expenses for families. These challenges were compounded by the socioeconomic consequences of neonatal illnesses and the fact that these conditions can lead to death or severe disabilities.

In 2016, the status of neonatal health caught the attention of the MoH, which urged the Palestinian National Institute of Public Health

(PNIPH) to assess health services at all neonatal and delivery hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza. More than 35 hospitals, including government, private, and NGO facilities were visited and assessed based on service availability and accessibility. Interviews were conducted with the heads of related units at all hospitals, decision makers at the MoH, and mothers of infants staying in intensive care units at the time. Additionally, guidelines for neonatal referrals at each hospital were reviewed to improve the effectiveness of the process.

Global Overview

Neonatal mortality (the mortality of infants within the first 28 days of life) is most pronounced in low and middle-income countries, where 99% of worldwide neonatal deaths occur. Globally, two out of three infants die in the first month, two-thirds during the first week, and two-thirds of those who die during the first week die within the first 24 hours.

Approximately 7,000 newborns die every day, making neonatal health a key indicator of population health.

(UNICEF)

Based on the study, PNIPH provided the MoH with actionable insights and recommendations. Findings noted the lack of specialties and subspecialties among health practitioners; the limited availability of incubators, equipment, and medication; difficulty and delays in transferring neonates to more specialized hospitals; and the occurrence of inappropriate referrals.

Influencing policy is always at the heart of PNIPH's work, and these efforts would not be possible without close collaboration with the MoH. After reviewing and discussing the results of the study, the MoH quickly took action,

naming Dr. Hatem Khammash, head of the neonatal unit at Al-Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem, as the Minister's advisor for neonatal issues. The Minister, in turn, is continuing to monitor and supervise the MoH's intervention to improve neonatal health services and health in Palestine.

PNIPH is also cooperating with experts from the MoH to plan a better design for the neonatal referral system that will boost its efficiency, reducing the financial burden and reaping better results over the next several years.



Neonatal-Perinatal Referral Protocol developed by PNIPH in collaboration with the MoH and neonatal health experts.

For more information, visit PNIPH at www.pniph.org