

Health & Nutrition

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Illnesses that would be easily treated or are uncommon in much of the world continue to cause misery and unnecessary death in Sierra Leone. Poor nutrition, diarrhea, HIV/AIDS, malaria, anemia, tuberculosis, and complications during childbirth are but a few examples. WHI is responding to the sheer scale of the problem by focusing on high impact interventions that improve the health, wellbeing, and survival of women and young children. Through all our health programs, WHI is working to strengthen the public health system so that in the future all Sierra Leoneans will have access to high quality & affordable healthcare and prevention services.

Helping Babies Breathe (HBB)

WHI is pleased to announce a new Maternal & Child Health program called Helping Babies Breathe (HBB). In a partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics and Children's Prize Foundation, WHI is training and equipping Sierra Leonean health workers in newborn resuscitation. WHI will train 2,150 caregivers from 42 chiefdoms in five districts over the course of one year, with the ultimate goal of reducing neonatal mortality in hard-to-reach areas. A key concept of HBB is the "Golden Minute." Within the first minute of life, babies should either be breathing well or ventilated with a bag and mask. The training materials are pictorial-based to facilitate easy learning for individuals who can't read. They consist of a flip chart, learner workbook, poster, and a realistic newborn simulator (mannequin) with a bulb suction and bag-mask ventilator.

In 2016, WHI implemented a 10-day trial of HBB's second edition curriculum with birth attendants, testing it in the local context and providing feedback on the curriculum. WHI also identified where in the five target districts HBB training will take place, and received approval from the Ministry of Health & Sanitation. Trainings will begin in April of 2017. WHI still needs to raise critical funds to support this project.



Enable the Children

The Enable the Children (ETC) program provides physical therapy, occupational therapy, care, and support services to approximately 580 children living with disabilities in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Program staff visit children in their homes and teach their family and caregivers how to support children with disabilities using interactive play, developmental positioning, and feeding support. ETC also provides counseling for the family as they learn how to nurture their child while simultaneously providing a loving home life. Pervasive cultural beliefs lead many mothers to blame themselves when a child is born with a disability. To debunk this cultural belief, ETC constantly reassures parents that they've done nothing wrong by parenting a child with a disability.

ETC doesn't stop with medical care and therapy. Through child sponsorship, the program helps cover the school fees of the children and provides small business start-up grants to families who've had to change their means of work to care for their child. ETC also works with local carpenters, tailors, and technicians to provide specialized equipment for patients including specially-designed chairs, wheelchairs, standing frames, leg gaiters (to support standing and walking), and drop-foot supports. This specialized equipment allows the children to either sit or stand in a supported position, or use their legs and hands more effectively, which maximizes their ability to function.

In 2016, ETC trained five therapy workers and assistants, three family support workers, and one pastoral support worker. These individuals, combined with existing staff, conducted 97 disability clinics where 404 new patients were admitted to the programs. Therapists made 1,923 home visits, provided specialized equipment to 207 children, provided business start-up grants to 12 families, and supported 23 children with school sponsorship. Over 1,000 families were seen by family support workers, and 210 local leaders were helped to understand the needs of children with disabilities and their families.



Mamusu lives with her grandfather in the east of Freetown and has been in the Enable the Children program since 2007, one of ETC's first clients. Mamusu suffers from cerebral palsy and can't use her lower limbs. She is over 18 years old, an adult according to Sierra Leonean law. As a result, she is being discharged from the program with a small grant to help her start a business. She was supposed to get a new wheelchair from WHI, but was surprised by something even better, a Personal Energy Transportation cart! She can go anywhere she pleases by using her hands to crank the cart. Her new wheelchair will now be donated to another needy child.

Critical follow-up care for Ebola Survivors

World Hope International (WHI) continues to be a key part of Sierra Leone's Ebola recovery effort. WHI is dedicating to improving access to care for all Ebola survivors by reducing financial, logistical, and psychosocial barriers. Ebola survivors suffer many medical complications such as joint inflammation, eye inflammation, and hearing problems, and it's critical that they receive timely medical care. To ensure this, WHI developed a process for how patients are referred from the public health unit to the district hospital for more advanced care depending on their needs. Thanks to these efforts, Ebola survivors made 432 visits to public health centers. WHI Survivor Advocates conducted 2,813 home visits to monitor survivors' well-being and health needs. Clinical Training Officers followed up on more complex patients after discharge from the health centers to monitor the quality of care they received and track outcomes.

Though Ebola is not currently active in Sierra Leone, there is always a risk that it will resurface. Recent studies have indicated that the Ebola virus can persist in male semen for as long as 9 months.¹ In 2016, WHI assisted Sierra Leone's Ministry of Health & Sanitation in establishing semen testing sites in areas of high concentrations of male Ebola survivors in order to help prevent the spread of Ebola to their partners. WHI operated the clinic (Project Shield) for testing and counselling male Ebola survivors in Bombali, Tonkolili and Koinadugu. For all individuals tested, WHI provided pre- and post-test counseling services by trained social workers. To date, over 200 men have registered and have received at least one semen test. Over 160 have completed two tests with a "Not Detected" result obtained, and therefore have been medically cleared.

An Ebola survivor suffering from abdominal pain and bleeding for over a year had been shunned by family and community members because they believed that she was possessed by a witch and cursed by the events that had occurred. She was living in a tiny shack by the side of the road selling small bits of food to survive when one of WHI's Survivor Advocates met her. She was reluctant to admit she was a survivor at first, but finally shared her medical history with the Survivor Advocate. The Survivor Advocate transported her to the District hospital where she was easily treated for an infection. She is now back at her village with her family and doing well, participating in village life and caring actively for her remaining children and family. The Survivor Advocate meets with her monthly and has enrolled her in a program that offers livelihood assistance to survivors.



Delivery of much needed medical supplies

WHI coordinated the delivery of medicines and supplies to 38 health centers in Sierra Leone. One of these deliveries involved 2 technologically advanced ultrasound machines that were donated by General Electric (GE) to Kamakwie Wesleyan Hospital and Masanga Hospital. WHI set up training sessions for hospital staff with a GE technician from Nigeria. The ultrasound machines have already improved diagnoses and care at both hospitals, and a large number of women have been able to access better prenatal care because of them.

¹Schnirring, L. (2015, October 14). Study indicates Ebola may persist in semen for months. Retrieved February 05, 2017, from <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2015/10/study-indicates-ebola-may-persist-semen-months>

Ambulance Services

Many patients in Sierra Leone live far from medical centers and don't have any means of transportation. In 2016, WHI ambulances transported over 750 pregnant women to three hospitals in Sierra Leone. WHI maintains strong partnerships with each hospital, which provides coordination and supervision of ambulance services. Getting women to the hospital faster has saved the lives of many women and their babies. As communities are becoming increasingly aware of ambulance services, the numbers of women utilizing the service are steadily increasing. At the Makeni Regional Hospital, the WHI ambulance is covering the night shift. In an average evening, the WHI ambulance will transport two to four maternity patients who need medical care from the local Public Health Unit to the Regional Hospital.



Preventing and Treating Malnutrition

Through support from UNICEF, the WHI Nutrition Project focuses on reducing child mortality in Sierra Leone by promoting the uptake of healthy feeding practices and managing acute malnutrition of infants and young children. There is a critical need for this work as an estimated 120 of every 1,000 children don't live to see their fifth birthday.² Even though improvements in rates of nutritional stunting (low height for age) and wasting (low weight for height) of children under five have been made, 28.8% are stunted, 4.7% wasted, and 76% have anemia.^{3,4}

The Nutrition Project targets 10,900 women of child-bearing age and 87,000 children who are under five

²United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNICEF, WHO, United Nations Population Division and the World Bank)

³Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey (SLNNS), 2014

⁴Sierra Leone Micronutrients Survey (SLMS), 2013



years old. In 2016, WHI screened 76,000 children for malnutrition and treated 3,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition using ready-to-use therapeutic food. Because the ability to screen and monitor vulnerable individuals requires a reliable registration system, WHI identified and registered all pregnant or lactating women and children under five in Bombali district.

WHI continued to support and build the capacity of 1,746 mother support groups (3,492 members), where mothers and others in the community learn about infant feeding and mobilize the community to recognize and get help for malnourished children. For 254 new mother support groups, WHI organized infant feeding demonstrations and helped empower women to breastfeed their children, while also participating in the World Breast Feeding Week activities. WHI plans to make HIV test kits available at all health centers in order to test for HIV in malnourished children, as HIV infection can often be a cause of malnutrition.

Training Community Health Workers in Underserved Areas

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are the main providers of health services in rural Sierra Leone. In order to address the high maternal and infant mortality rate in Sierra Leone, WHI has been training and supporting CHWs to deliver quality services in the areas of disease surveillance, reproductive health, maternal & child health (MCH), and community based management of malnutrition in the Bombali district.

In 2016, with support from UNICEF, 750 CHWs completed a 10-day training on maternal and neonatal health and malnutrition. These 750 CHWs provided oversight and care to 20,000 pregnant and lactating women and 87,000 children aged 0 to 5. The same CHWs also received a refresher training on the Malaria Rapid Diagnostic Test. In addition to coordinating trainings, WHI conducted CHW performance reviews and monthly supervision visits. The results were promising, with CHWs showing substantial improvements in the quality of care they are providing to villages. WHI also worked within the Bombali district Ministry of Health system to improve collaboration between chiefdoms to meet the health challenges faced by young children there.



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