Lack of healthcare information – a hidden killer

The International Day of the Midwife is an annual event, where midwives from all the organisations affiliated to the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) highlight the contribution midwives make to the health of their nations through their knowledge and skills. And in the ‘information age’, where the internet has globalised access to information, it would be reasonable to expect that, in 2009, reliable information and knowledge on maternal health is available to all midwives, as and when they need it.

Yet, the evidence tells a starkly different story. Every day, large numbers of women and children die unnecessarily because midwives and nurses lack access to even the most basic information and knowledge. In 2008, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that every minute, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth and that every year, over one million newborns die within their first 24 hours of life for lack of quality care. Many of these deaths could have been avoided had the birth attendant known what to do and where to seek help. As a result, efforts to achieve the fifth millennium development goal (MDG5), which aims for a 75% reduction in maternal mortality by 2015, have been undermined. MDG5 is off-track and is unlikely to be met at the present rate of progress.

Policy makers have, so far, been slow to respond to this hidden killer. A new global movement, ‘Healthcare Information For All by 2015 (HIFA2015)’ has mobilised over 2300 members from 148 countries to achieve an ambitious goal: ‘By 2015, every person worldwide will have access to an informed healthcare provider’. HIFA2015 does not provide healthcare information but, via two dynamic email forums, supports sharing of experience among the thousands of healthcare information activities already being implemented by its members and others worldwide.

The HIFA annual challenge focuses on the information needs of specific groups of health workers. The first was launched in 2008, with funding from the British Medical Association (BMA) and covered the information needs of all healthcare students. In 2009, attention has turned to midwives and nurses. We are working with the ICM, the International Council of Nurses, the RCM, the RCN and the WHO to identify the information needs of midwives and nurses and how to meet them. The RCM, BMA and RCN is providing funding.

You can join HIFA2015 for free and contribute by sending an email to: HIFA2015-admin@dgroups.org with your name, organisation and a brief description of your professional interests. For further details, see our website at: www.hifa2015.org