Background & Context

Partners for World Health (PWH) is a nonprofit organization that collects medical supplies and equipment from healthcare facilities, manufacturers, other organizations, and individuals. We sort, evaluate, repackage, and prepare these supplies and equipment for distribution to individuals, communities, and healthcare facilities in need both locally and abroad. PWH is the only New England-based nonprofit organization that collects, repackages, and distributes medical supplies to those in need. It is estimated that $10 billion is spent annually in disposal fees amongst hospitals across the U.S. discarding more than 2.5 million tons of supplies, equipment, and trash. Since 2009, PWH has collected more than 2 million pounds of medical supplies that would have otherwise been destined for local landfills. Our work limits the negative impact of healthcare on the environment and provides needed health care resources to the developing world. PWH also aims to improve health conditions abroad by sending medical personnel on medical missions to developing countries.

Since 2012, the UMaine Chapter of PWH has been a group of determined individuals carrying out the mission statement described above. Dedicated members spend hundreds of hours throughout the year voluntarily collecting, sorting, and packaging unused medical equipment obtained from Northern Light’s Eastern Maine Medical Center, St. Joseph’s Hospital, and other local donors throughout the greater Bangor area. A critical part of the chapter’s goals is to redistribute these materials to developing nations, as well as within the local community. To distribute these items overseas, PWH ships containers and/or brings hundreds of pounds of medical supplies on medical mission trips. In the past, UMaine students have traveled on these mission trips to Guatemala, Senegal, Uganda, and soon to Ethiopia for the first time ever. Our chapter has taken a particular interest in maternal child healthcare in developing countries after having been influentially involved in the conception and implementation of Project 10,000. This project is an initiative to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in the communities we travel to in Africa. Those involved in this project provide pregnant women with empowering self-care knowledge as well as kits containing the supplies necessary for a sterile birth and items to keep their newborns warm. The goal of Project 10,000 is to provide these services to over 10,000 women across Africa.

The project proposed here, Project Plan Ahead, is intended to coincide with Project 10,000 in May 2020. In addition to providing both knowledge and sterile supplies (Project 10,000), we will help these women make the best plan possible for their pregnancy and delivery (Project Plan Ahead). Many pregnant women in low-resource settings of Senegal have limited access to healthcare and may end up giving birth outside of a hospital, especially without a proper plan in place before the onset of labor. Therefore, it is vital that these women be well-informed of their risks of complications with delivery and have necessary sterile birthing equipment in their possession at the time of delivery for use by their midwife/caregiver. The best way to ensure that this will happen, as the students who have traveled to Senegal with PWH in years past have discovered, is to help mothers make a plan for their delivery.

Project Overview

For our project, we will to provide pregnancy planning services to 500 pregnant women in Thies, Senegal. Of this sample population of pregnant women, we hope our intervention decreases the number of unsuccessful pregnancies from what is predicted by the current infant mortality rate (IMR) and maternal mortality rate (MMR) in Senegal, which is about 30 infant deaths per 1,000 live births and 315 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, respectively. To verify that we reach this goal, the current IMR and MMR will be compared to that which occurs in the sample of women who receive our intervention. We will survey the women who go through our program before receiving pregnancy planning consultation, education, and a birthing kit and then again within the following years to determine the outcome of the pregnancy.
Specific steps for implementation of this project under the supervision of registered nurses:

1. In preparation for Project 10,000 in Senegal, supplies to be included in birthing kits for women will be gathered and packaged from our warehouses in Portland or Bangor. All educational materials and surveys for expecting mothers will also be printed and finalized.
2. As May approaches, the logistics of the trip (including air travel, housing, in-country transportation, translator services, visa, and food) will be finalized with the founder and president of PWH, Elizabeth McLeilan, RN, MPH, who will also travel to Senegal and lead our team.
3. The group of clinical and non-clinical personnel traveling to Senegal will meet for an orientation where all important information and logistics concerning the trip will be discussed.
4. The fieldwork for Project 10,000 and Project Plan Ahead will be performed where PWH registered nurses and students will administer services and implement the collection of data.
   a. Educational sessions will be provided for expecting mothers to learn about how to maintain a healthy pregnancy and the possible complications that can arise.
      i. Expecting mother’s due date.
      ii. Where they can go to deliver their baby.
      iii. What transportation they can acquire at the onset of labor.
      iv. Who will be delivering their baby.
      v. Other logistical considerations.
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5. PWH will partner with the health center in Thies, Senegal for the follow-up collection of data 4-7 months after the intervention to determine the outcomes of pregnancies. Evaluation of our findings will occur after the collection of results.

Peace, Sustainability, and Future Impacts

The pregnancy planning consultation component of this project will be essential for us to impart a sustainable impact with this work. Pregnancy planning consultation is imperative because it will give women the agency to take control of their pregnancy and health. Other organizations or charities will flood the developing world with resources and supplies, but fail to provide the education or support to properly use those tools in an effective way. By providing women with the necessary sterile supplies and information for a healthy pregnancy in Project 10,000, we are providing the raw materials needed for positive health outcomes. Additionally, through the implementation of Project Plan Ahead, we are providing women with the firm support of a solid plan as well as resources to use, increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome. The combination of these raw materials (knowledge and supplies) with the proper support for the use of those materials will also help these Senegalese women teach their friends and family about what they have learned. In this way, the impact of our project will persist even in our absence.

Expected Outcomes, Personal & Community Growth

This project will foster peace in a very important way. We will create relationships that cross international, racial, religious, and cultural lines to bring people together from very disparate backgrounds for one common purpose, which is most simply to promote the health and wellbeing of new and vulnerable mothers. Additionally, for the students participating in this project, this trip will provide a new perspective on the global health disparities that exist in our world. A critical aspect of our work is educating people in the New England area about global health issues and the problems we encounter in our medical mission work overseas. The intention of doing this is to inspire change in the way our healthcare system utilizes supplies and inspire activity to support underserved populations in our world.