

WMA STATEMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF A MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH HANDBOOK

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PREAMBLE

The WMA believes that both a continuum of care and family empowerment is necessary to improve the health and wellbeing of the mother and child. The reduction of maternal mortality ratio and infant deaths was an important objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The reductions of the maternal mortality ratio, neonatal mortality rate and the under-five mortality rate are important targets to be achieved under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The maternal and child health (MCH) handbook is a comprehensive home-based booklet designed to provide relevant health information and include integrated mother and child health records. The MCH handbook covers health records and information on pregnancy, delivery, neonatal and childhood periods, and child growth and immunizations. The MCH handbook supports the integration of maternal, neonatal and child health services. The MCH handbook is not only about health education, but about creating ownership with women and families.

In 1948, Japan became the first country in the world to create and distribute a maternal and child health (MCH) handbook, in order to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of the mother and child.

There are now approximately 40-country versions of the MCH handbook, all adapted to the local culture and socio-economic context. There are a variety of handbooks and educational materials concerned to MCH in many countries. The use of MCH handbooks has helped improve the knowledge of mothers on maternal and child health issues, and has contributed to changing behaviors during pregnancy, delivery and post-delivery period.

The MCH handbook can promote the health of pregnant women, neonates and children by using it as a tool for strengthening a continuum of care. Physicians can make better care decisions, by referring to the patient's medical history and health-check data recorded in the MCH handbook. The MCH handbook alone has not been shown to improve health indicators. The benefits are maximized when women and children have access to relevant healthcare services based on information recorded in the handbook. Such benefits of the handbook could be shared globally.

In Japan, a digital handbook is spreading progressively. The digital handbook is expected to be utilized in a way that protects confidentiality of the patient's health information. Some private kindergarten and primary schools request access to the MCH as part of their admission process, placing pressure on parents and physicians to modify the answers to questions in the handbook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The WMA recommends that the constituent member associations encourage their health authorities and health institutions to provide accessible and easy to understand information regarding maternal and child health. The MCH handbook, or equivalents, can be an important tool to improve continuity of care and benefit health promotion for mothers, neonates and children.
2. The WMA recommends that the constituent member associations and medical professionals promote the adaptation to local setting and the utilization of MCH handbooks, or equivalents, in order to leave no one behind with respect to SDGs, especially for non-literate people, migrant families, refugees, minorities, people in underserved and remote areas.
3. When using a MCH handbook or similar documentation, in either digital or print form, the confidentiality of the individual health information and the privacy of mothers and children should be strictly protected. It should be used exclusively to improve health and wellbeing of mothers, neonates, and children. It should not be used in the admission procedures of schools.
4. The constituent member associations should promote local research to evaluate the utilization of the MCH handbooks, or equivalents, and make recommendations to improve the quality of care in the local setting.