SAVING LIVES IN THE MIDDLE
Newborn Healthcare That Meets Africa’s Needs


East African doctors and patients are facing a false choice between low-cost traditional methods and unaffordable, cutting-edge global medical technologies.

Research released today shows that babies who would have been placed in the sun to treat jaundice, or forced to share expensive equipment, received markedly higher quality care at Rwandan hospitals using world-class phototherapy devices designed for low-income regions.

"Quality medical care does not have to be expensive to be effective," said Dr. Diane Gashumba, Rwandan Minister of Health today. "Our medical community is faced with the choice between technology A and technology Z, when there’s a whole alphabet of opportunities to be developed in the middle. It’s time to develop those appropriate technologies."

This was the overarching theme of the Newborn Health Symposium held in Kigali today by the Rwandan Ministry of Health, Rwandan Pediatric Association (RPA), and NGO, D-Rev.

“What we typically understand to be ‘high quality’ medical technology is often both unaffordable and ill-suited to communities desperately in need of better healthcare,” agreed D-Rev CEO, Krista Donaldson. “For example, we
can design artificial limbs for the Olympic Games, yet most above-knee amputees in India still use simple bamboo canes. We need to redefine our goals as medical pioneers – and remind ourselves who we are pushing the medical envelope for.”

D-Rev, the Rwandan Ministry of Health and RPA recently concluded a year-long study at 46 hospitals across Rwanda, providing doctors with 106 new phototherapy devices to treat jaundice in newborns.

The collaborative study, released today, demonstrates that machines were adopted quickly, and used by medical staff to provide a higher quality of care to newborns over the 12-months studied. Jaundice may not be a killer in countries like the United States, where D-Rev is based, and deaths are extremely rare.

“But contrast that with studies that show that 119 times more newborns die from jaundice in regions with fewer resources, and the inequality created by expensive medical technologies becomes clear,” said Dr Lisine Tuyisenge, co-author of the study and general secretary of the RPA.

Symposium attendees, which included government officials, pediatricians, and innovators from Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, echoed the need for more appropriate technologies for all newborn health challenges in the region.

“We must ask ourselves why African men and women are mourning the loss of newborns to easily curable illnesses like jaundice?” concluded Minister Gashumba.

“There’s a wealth of innovative, affordable and appropriate life-saving technologies emerging from and for the continent, designed around the needs of Africa. It’s time we, as governments, academics and entrepreneurs, scale our investments in research, policies, and adoption of solutions designed for the people we to serve.”

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