



Osney Foundation
for Medical Education
and Research

Art for health: reducing maternal and newborn mortality

Increasing awareness and
promoting action towards
safe motherhood and
childbirth through art

**CONDIVIDIAMO
LA POSSIBILITA'
DI SORRIDERE?**

1. Specific aims

Each year four million newborns and 500,000 pregnant women die due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth: 99 % of these deaths

occur in the poorest countries of the world. These figures, exceeding the amount of deaths caused per year by AIDS and malaria combined, are evidence of one of the starkest health inequities of our time. Unfortunately,

few people, including medical personnel, are aware of the scale of this public health problem. Much could be done to save the lives of newborns and their mothers if the general public was fully informed about the risks associated with childbirth in underdeveloped nations, and how these risks can be averted.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR) and the Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research (GFMER) are determined to bring the problem of newborn and maternal mortality beyond the boundaries of public health through the development of a new initiative involving a consortium of people from diverse backgrounds. We are committed to engaging this multidisciplinary group of people in constructive dialogue with a view to broadly disseminating powerful messages about the dire conditions many pregnant women and newborns endure, and which stress that all women regardless of socioeconomic status should experience positive birth outcomes.

We believe that these messages can be successfully transmitted through paintings which combine text and imagery. Because art often functions to make complex socio-political issues accessible to people, this approach may prove to be an effective means of informing people about maternal and newborn health issues. Furthermore, by raising peoples' awareness of these issues, we hope to generate greater mobilization of human and financial resources towards the prevention of the millions of unnecessary maternal and infant deaths that occur each year. The specific aims of the proposal are:

- Over the course of one year, commission 12 paintings (one per month) each representative of

important maternal and newborn health issues;

- Display one painting each month on the RHR's, GFMER's, and other collaborating organizations' websites accompanied by a short educational text. This text will elaborate, in non technical terms, on the artistic and public health aspects of each painting;
- Organize an exhibition of the paintings in Geneva and other cities around the world, and sell the paintings as a fundraising mechanism.
- Publish a catalogue of the art exhibition to display the artwork and educate the public about current maternal and newborn health issues;
- Engage with global media outlets (including billboards) to disseminate key messages and to notify the public of the project.

These objectives will be achieved through the collaborative efforts of the project group. RHR and GFMER will assume primary responsibility for the implementation of the project under the direction of Professor Willy Pasini from GFMER. The painter, Ms Elisabetta Farina, will be responsible for producing artwork depicting women from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds, and which convey pertinent messages in multiple languages. The artist will work closely with RHR, GFMER and all other interested organizations to decide the subject matter and message inscribed in each painting.

2. Background

During the last year, several articles published in the most influential scientific journals highlighted the scope of poor maternal and newborn health outcomes in the least developed countries of the world. Despite these publications, knowledge about this tragedy remains bounded within medical and public health related

professions. Our goal is to change this situation through the implementation of new communication strategies that will result in the wide-scale dissemination of information about maternal and newborn health issues. Based on the global reach and effectiveness of AIDS and malaria media-based awareness campaigns, we believe this is the first step towards galvanizing the public to commit to activities aimed at improving women and infants' lives.

Professor Zecchi, editor of *Arte*, the major art magazine in Italy, advocates that contemporary art should transcend the limits of the art world and become more actively engaged with aspects of everyday life. In agreement with his vision, we assert that through the usage of contemporary art, we can generate an initiative that will raise awareness of maternal and newborn health issues, and greatly contribute to the recruitment of resources towards ensuring safer pregnancy and childbirth.

3. The art

3.1 The paintings – subjects and themes

The art project will include twelve paintings (1m x 1m), each capturing the distinctive features of women from different areas of the world. The women depicted in the paintings will “speak” by means of an inserted caption reminiscent of comic strips, conveying specific messages in their “own” language. Although representation of all ethnicities and languages may not be feasible, we believe the incorporation of diverse languages and ethnic characteristics into the artwork can foster the formation of a common front for the improvement of maternal and newborn health worldwide.

Women celebrities in different fields may be contacted to see if they would like to participate in our project. We are interested in possibly using their images as inspirations for the paintings based on the premise that the integration of popular women figures into the artwork may attract greater attention to the project.

3.2 The Artist

Ms Elisabetta Farina is an artist who documents through her art aspects of women's psychology, including their reactions to emotional stress. Although the women in her paintings are often portrayed responding to stressful situations, their responses are typically empowering and positive. Ms Farina uses an artistic expression developed by painters of the Pop Art movement in the 1960s in a post-modern context to reveal the often heroic role that women play in today's world. She has had several exhibitions in various cities in Italy.

The art of Ms Farina is well-suited for the proposed project. Her art focuses on women; is catchy even to the inexperienced art viewer; allows for the transmission of public health messages through a combination of images and text; and is already recognized and featured in exhibitions and art magazines. Her painting reproduced on the proposal cover is the first image of the series. The provocative question (“Condividiamo la possibilità di sorridere?” Or in English: “Shall we share the possibility to smile?”) forces the viewer to pause and consider her right to smile about her pregnancy, and the future for her and her child. It also suggests that the viewer can share her happiness by contributing through solidarity towards a better world.

4. The project team

The core team of this initiative includes:
Prof Willy Pasini, Director, Department
of Sexual Health, GFMER
(Project Director)

Ms Elisabetta Farina, painter
Dr Francesco Aureli, Executive
Director, Imagine - Improving medicine
and growing international networks of
equality.

Ms Rebecca Harding, Communication
Officer, World Health
Organization

Dr Jennifer Harris Requejo, Post-
Doctorate Fellow, Population Research
Center, University of Texas

Ms Deborah Leydorf, Fundraising
Officer, World Health Fundraising
Officer, World Health
LeydorfOrganization

Mrs Manjula Lusti-Narasimhan,
Technical Officer, World Health
Organization

Dr Mario Meriardi, Medical Officer,
World Health Organization

Ms Janet Petitpierre, Graphic Artist,
World Health Organization

Dr Ola Saugstad, Professor in
Pediatrics, University of Oslo

Collaborators from various
geographical, cultural and ethnic
backgrounds will be identified to advise
the core team, and assure that
messages and painting subjects are
appropriate for different cultural
settings.

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