SUCCESS STORY

Faculty Training Breathes New Life into Liberia’s Public Nursing Program
Nurse Educators Share Practices for Prenatal and Postnatal Care
Indiana University/ University of Massachusetts Medical School/ University of Liberia/ Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts

Liberia’s high neonatal mortality rate of 27 deaths per 1,000 births\(^1\) makes the need for improved prenatal and postnatal health care a matter of life and death. Following years of conflict, the nation is steadily moving closer to providing reliable and efficient health care services for expectant mothers and infants, a cornerstone for a thriving society. To better prepare future health professionals, Liberian nurses Cynthia Bondoe and Ada Brown-Wraynee are two Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts (TNIMA) educators participating in a USAID project that embraces new methodologies to save lives.

Under the project among Indiana University (IU), the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the University of Liberia, and TNIMA, Cynthia and Ada were accepted to IU to complete their master’s degrees in nursing. “I really could not have pursued the master’s degree in Liberia because this type of program and the needed resources and technology do not exist in Liberia,” said Cynthia, a nurse educator since 2000. “My studies at IU have increased my knowledge and skills in the areas of teaching, evidence-based practice related to nursing theory, research and clinical practices.”

After receiving their master’s degrees, both nurses returned to Liberia to help develop curriculum for a new midwifery degree program at TNIMA and the University of Liberia. Now the more than 115 nursing students and 60 midwifery students attending these institutions will have the opportunity to enroll in the first publicly available baccalaureate nursing and midwifery degree programs starting in October 2014.

“Research on staffing in U.S. hospitals clearly shows better outcomes for patients when nurses have a BSN education. We would anticipate a lower mortality and morbidity rate for pregnant women as more nurses and midwives receive a baccalaureate education,” said Dr. Mary Beth Riner, associate dean for global affairs at IU’s School of Nursing.

The new curriculum will usher in a promising era in nurse education in Liberia. According to Riner, the current education of faculty has primarily used an apprenticeship approach where faculty members learn from other faculty and teach as they were taught as a student.

Cynthia and Ada also completed an American Academy of Pediatric Neonatal Resuscitation Program instructor course and were trained as trainers in the Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) technique. USAID is a partner of HBB, which is dedicated to providing birth attendants with neonatal resuscitation skills.

“Because of this partnership, we are presently conducting trainings in HBB with TNIMA physician’s assistants, professional nurses, senior midwifery students, and nursing and midwifery staff at the John F. Kennedy Medical Center in an effort to reduce infant and

neonatal mortalities in Liberia,” said Cynthia. “I have gained skills in the demonstration of neonatal resuscitation and helping babies breathe.”

Higher Education for Development manages the educational partnership project among Indiana University, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the University of Liberia, and Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts.

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