

Sixty Second Life and Death Decisions



GLOBAL COMMUNITY
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It is known as the Golden Minute because in those critical 60 seconds life-and-death decisions are made annually for millions of newly born infants in developing countries around the world.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 10% of infants require 'some assistance' in breathing. One-per-cent need 'full resuscitation' though one million babies still die annually because of their inability to breath properly. But 9% of this group can be saved with simple procedures and equipment. Governments, institutions and individuals across the globe are targeting this group of vulnerable infants in a myriad of projects under a common approach to—Helping Babies Breath (HBB).

Four Chicago-area nurses and Washington-headquartered Global Community Service Foundation (GCSF) raised funds and the medical team spent two weeks in central Vietnam on a Helping Babies Breath (HBB) project, instructing traditional midwives, nurses and doctors in the latest techniques and equipment.

During their fieldwork nurses Harriet Hawkins, Nancy Lins, and mother-and-daughter Betsy and Amy Rogers worked closely with GCSF country director Tam Nguyen and his logistical and translation assistants to ensure the visit's success.

Nurse Hawkins' husband, Warren Udelson, also accompanied the team provided logistical support as they held seminars in Vietnam's old imperial capital city of Hue, in Khe Sanh town, site of the most publicized battle of the 'American war' when North Vietnamese troops besieged a U.S. Marine base there for several months in 1968 and Dakrong.

"I think about that war a lot," said Harriet Hawkins. "It is always very near." But central Vietnam is facing a different 'war' these days and the American nurses are helping that cause.

Vietnam's health system, like similar services in most developing countries, is often under severe strain, particularly in poor rural areas such as Khe Sanh.



Nurse Elizabeth training 2 Pako male midwives in Khe Sanh.



Nurse Nancy teaching 2 Van Kieu ethnic midwives in Dakrong district.

Training, equipment and transportation infrastructure are often rudimentary and many infants are born at home.

Though babies can be helped with the simplest forms of resuscitation and equipment, these are constantly being refined and the nursing team was able to provide their students with the latest information.

The position of a baby's head can make a vital difference. Snapping a simple straw in two pieces, nurse Hawkins demonstrated that if the head was held incorrectly the baby's breathing could be fatally blocked in a similar way.

Though women are traditional birth attendants (TBA) one class was composed almost entire of men. Though many were fathers they had rarely attended a birthing, but now found themselves in a very unusual role because of the shortage of female assistants.

Men now played the role of new mothers as students worked in pairs with plastic babies to 'beat the clock' and achieve the 'golden minute' by overcoming any perceived birthing difficulties. The lesson was accompanied by lots of laughing and ultimate success.

In addition to basic grassroots training, the Americans also trained some 20 doctors and nurses to become instructors themselves and by providing them with teaching materials and supplies it will allow the Vietnamese to train other health workers in the new techniques.

GCSF hopes to continue raising funds to provide further training kits and to launch similar programs in its other 'operating area' in Myanmar.

"Helping millions of babies survive those first 60 seconds is a worldwide problem," said GCSF President, Marcia Selva. "It is particularly acute in areas where we work—in central Vietnam and Shan State in Myanmar—and a project such as this one can help save the lives of untold numbers of infants."