



Quality, Equity, Dignity

A Network for Improving Quality of Care
for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

NETWORK FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF CARE FOR MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH

Updated February 2019



Quality care for all

As countries expand their health systems towards achieving universal health coverage (UHC), both access to care and quality of care will be critical for ending preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths by 2030, as targeted by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is evidence that despite the progress made in increasing access and coverage, the gap in quality of care is contributing to avoidable complications and deaths among women, newborns and children. While the rate of skilled childbirth care globally has increased from 58% in 1990 to 73% in 2013 – mostly due to increases in facility-based births – giving birth in a health facility does not guarantee a safe birth. It is estimated that 303 000 women and 2.7 million newborn infants die annually¹ around the time of childbirth, and many more are affected by preventable illness. Provision of quality care is uneven, often failing to respect the rights and dignity of those who seek it. Countries will need to prioritize institutionalization of quality of care improvement in health services to ensure that “every woman, child and adolescent receives quality care throughout the continuum of care”.²

Quality, equity and dignity at the core of the Network

The Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (Quality of Care Network) works to ensure that every pregnant woman, newborn and child receives good-quality care throughout their life and continuum of care. The Quality of Care Network is underpinned by the values of quality, equity and dignity, and contributes towards the goals of the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health for Every Woman Every Child. It aims to halve maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths in health facilities within

1 Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015 (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/200009/9789241565110_eng.pdf; accessed 25 February 2019).

2 As articulated in 2015 WHO vision.

five years, improve the quality of care of women and children, and enhance patients’ experience of care in the participating countries.

The Network, launched in February 2017, brings together ten pathfinder countries and their local partners that are together already making strides in improving quality of health services, with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO). The Network provides support for the institutionalization and implementation of government-led national plans for quality improvement. The ministries of health of the ten Quality of Care Network countries – Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda – are working together to develop and implement evidence-based, yet context-specific, policies, strategies and intervention packages to harvest implementation ideas, as well as to assemble local information and experience that already exist to improve the quality of health services. Government leadership has led to a growing partnership with development organizations, nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, universities and the private sector to rally around the Quality of Care Network.

Institutionalizing and improving quality of care

In 2015, WHO prioritized quality of care improvement in health services to ensure that “every woman, child and adolescent receives quality care throughout the continuum of care”. To operationalize this vision, in 2016, WHO published a quality of care framework and standards to improve quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities. These standards define what is required to achieve high-quality care around the time of childbirth and are applicable to all health-care facilities that offer maternity services. To address the continuum of care through the life-course, WHO published in 2018 standards for improving quality of care for children and young

adolescents in health facilities. The standards place mothers, newborns and children at the centre of care by improving both the provision of health care as well as patients' experiences.

Driven by these evidence-based standards of care, the Quality of Care Network was created to support countries in achieving their targets to end preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths, stillbirths, and to work towards UHC by pursuing four strategic objectives:

- **Focus on national leadership** by building and strengthening national and district-level structures, institutions and mechanisms for improving quality of care in the health sector.
- **Accelerate action** through well-coordinated and harmonized efforts to improve quality of care using evidence-based standards, strategies and quality of care implementation packages of interventions.
- **Foster learning** through use of data to generate local evidence for co-development and sharing of knowledge and best practices on how to implement and sustain quality of care improvement.
- Develop, strengthen and sustain institutions and mechanisms for **accountability** for delivering quality health services.

The Network provides a platform for countries to ensure that quality of care becomes an integral part of health-care delivery; it facilitates intercountry learning, knowledge sharing, and generation of local evidence and best practices.

Progress thus far

Since the launch of the Quality of Care Network in 2017, the Network countries have made tremendous progress. Network countries are in the process of establishing strong leadership and governance structures for quality at all levels of the health system in their effort towards achieving UHC. At the same time, every country is at different stages in their efforts to drive quality of care for maternal, newborn and child health, as shown by the highlights below:

- All the countries have provided government leadership to institutionalize quality of care through establishing or strengthening government structures for quality of care at all levels; stakeholder coordination mechanisms, as well as harmonizing methods and intervention packages for improving maternal and newborn quality of care are also in place.
- Countries have developed national quality of care implementation plans informed by current quality of care initiatives, set national goals and targets, and consolidated tools and packages to enable quality improvement implementation at district and facility levels.
- Countries have mobilized local resources at the national and subnational levels through national coordination mechanisms that bring all partners together for implementing quality of care activities.
- Countries have selected learning districts and facilities that will be at the forefront of documenting local experiences and best practices, and generating evidence for sharing to develop local effective and scalable strategies and intervention packages.
- Since April 2018, each country has started working with local institutions on setting up a learning system to harvest and build on the expertise and know-how being developed by the quality improvement teams, and to share their data, knowledge and experiences to inform further quality improvement interventions.
- Countries are currently integrating the paediatric standards of care into their national roadmaps for integrated implementation of maternal, newborn and child quality of care improvement.

Many countries have expressed interest in becoming part of the Quality of Care Network, with Sierra Leone the 10th country to join the Network in December 2017.

Timeline: The Network for Improving Quality of Care (QoC) for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (January 2016–March 2019)

JANUARY 2016

- First draft implementation guidance
- Effective implementation interventions proposed

JUNE 2016

- Orientation on QoC standards & implementation science
- Rapid mapping of QoC situation in selected countries

AUGUST 2016

Official launch of the WHO standards for improving quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities



OCTOBER 2016

Governments of nine pathfinder countries initiate engagement at the national level and prepare to join the Network

- Bangladesh
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- India
- Malawi
- Nigeria
- Uganda

From March 2017 and through 2018

Network working groups:

- Implementation methods
- Monitoring
- Advocacy for Quality, Equity, Dignity

Webinar series:

- Series 1: Point of care quality improvement for maternal and newborn health
- Series 2: Quality of Care Country Highlights
- Series 3: Water, sanitation and hygiene for improved quality of care

Countries:

- Roadmaps developed
- Structures galvanized
- Preparation for implementation



www.qualityofcarenetwork.org

Launch of the Network in Lilongwe



Leadership:

- Joint statement, 14 February 2017
- Network strategic objectives of Leadership, Action, Learning, Accountability

DECEMBER 2017

Action:

From roadmaps to implementation (Dar es Salaam meeting)

Sierra Leone joins the Network

MARCH 2018

Countries leading implementation:

- Preparations for learning district orientation
- Defining national QoC improvement packages
- Development of monitoring framework

APRIL 2018



- WHO standards for improving quality of care for children and young adolescents in health facilities

Learning:

- Developing national learning systems to support delivery of QoC (Entebbe meeting)

MARCH 2019

2nd Meeting of the Network for Improving Quality for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health:

Accountability:

Demonstrating accountability and learning from implementation

- Country data
- Learning

NOVEMBER 2018

Capability development of country teams

- Orientation workshop for technical resource persons supporting implementation
- Forge a common understanding & approach in setting-up, facilitating and monitoring implementation
- Harvest learning for scaling up of quality of care in the Network countries

SEPTEMBER 2018

Start of the Quality Talks podcast

Stories of healthcare professionals who are experienced in running and managing quality of care initiatives, whether at a very small scale or country-wide



<https://quality-talks.blubrry.net/>

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Cover photo: A pregnant woman and child stand in a hallway at the Kaloko Clinic, Ndola, Copperbelt Province, Zambia, in November 2016.
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