

Universal Health Coverage Day is a Pathway to Promoting Antenatal Screening among Ugandan mothers



By Denis Akankunda Bwesigye

Following the first National Universal Health Coverage Symposium in Uganda, organized by the SPEED Initiative in August 2015, efforts have been ongoing support for policy actions and reforms to make health care coverage for all a reality in Uganda. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) means everyone can access the quality health services they need despite their social-economic status. The World Bank Group and the World Health Organization (WHO) have identified UHC as a top priority for sustainable development.

This December 12th, 2016, the world will be celebrating the Universal Health Coverage day, whose theme this year is, “Act with Ambition”. This year’s UHC doubles as the 12th is the anniversary of the first unanimous United Nations resolution calling for countries to provide affordable, quality health care to every person, everywhere. In fact UHC has been included in the new Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations.

My message for this year’s UHC theme is to remind all Uganda’s development partners and local healthcare practitioners that we should not despair before assuring universal health coverage for our

expecting mothers who continue to die in labour at unacceptable rate. I wish to rally support around promoting antenatal screening and assuring quality clinical capacities throughout Uganda’s health system.

Utilization of antenatal screening in most developing countries including Uganda faces challenges such as, high cost of health care, long distance to health facilities, limited transportation means, a lack of knowledge for the importance of ANC screening among couples, poor clinical capacities, inadequate technical personnel, and lack of independence by women to make health care decisions.

Although Uganda has witnessed a decline in maternal mortality ratio from 435 to 410 per 100,000 live births from 2004 to mid-2011, the number of mothers dying in pregnancy is still unacceptably high. Maternal and child health conditions that include anaemia, sepsis, pneumonia, and malaria have continuously been reported to carry the highest disease burden in Uganda.

Benefits to antenatal screening include among others, improved awareness of maternal and newborn health needs and self-care during pregnancy, learning healthy lifestyles and dietary

practices like iron supplementation, safety and injury prevention, learning preventive lifestyles against malaria through use of insecticide treated mosquito nets, emotional and physical preparedness for birth and baby care especially preparing for early and exclusive breastfeeding, and learning postnatal decision-making like use of family planning for birth spacing.

More than 100 low- and middle-income countries, home to almost three quarters of the world’s population, have already rolled out UHC. As a nation, we should strive to invest in the health of our people by offering UHC particularly to expecting mothers and all Ugandans overall.

The SPEED Project under the Makerere University School of Public Health is positioned and committed to providing policy analysis technical support to both government and other stakeholders in developing policies for Universal Health Coverage. The project is an EU-funded partnership with African and European institutions.

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