



Looking to the future of women's health

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Statistics on women's health are not easy to stomach. The World Health Organization tells us that every minute a woman dies from complications related to childbirth and pregnancy. For every woman that dies, more than 20 are seriously ill or disabled. That is nearly 530 000 women dead each year and millions with long term health problems. UNAIDS tells us that in sub-Saharan Africa, 61 per cent of newly infected people with HIV are women. Of all the new infections in young people, 75 per cent are in young women. UNFPA say that 200 million women worldwide have no access to contraceptives. One third of all pregnancies are unintended and mostly unwanted. Every year, 20 million unsafe abortions are carried out, with half a million women dying as a result. There are more than 300 million disabled women in the world, 75 per cent of whom live in developing countries. Most experience huge discrimination in terms of accessing healthcare including sexual and reproductive health services.

The figures are grim. It begs the question, what is the future for women's health? This edition of Health Exchange contains articles about people trying to improve women's health in innovative ways. Two strong themes emerge. The first is about women taking the initiative in difficult circumstances, showing leadership and making decisions about improving their own health and environment. You will see this in articles on maternal mortality, disability, and HIV and AIDS.

The second theme is about people working to address neglected issues in women's health and there are articles about older women refugees, community-driven healthcare in isolated areas, and female condoms.

We value your opinion on the topics and themes. Look out for the boxes at the end of each article that ask for your input and get in touch via the on-line Health Exchange (<http://healthexchangenews.com>) or by email (healthexchange@healthlink.org.uk).

Next issue: Social determinants of health

The WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health published a report in September 2008 called *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*.

It challenges us to spend the next generation in making sure there is equity in healthcare through improving social determinants, but what does this mean in practice? Are you part of this transformational process? What are you doing to improve the social determinants of health? Perhaps you have a well thought through view about the concept and its implementation?

If you want to share your experiences and analysis with other readers in the next issue, please email healthexchange@healthlink.org.uk or phone +44 (0)207 549 0240. We would love to hear from you.