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KAZAKHSTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Attention to Quality Improves Maternal Care

Maternity hospitals in the country's capital are offering better maternal and child care



Photo: Abt Associates

More and more women give birth with assistance from their family members.

The introduction of quality improvement methods in health care facilities gives medical staff the tools to uncover problems and then find solutions.

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"I always dreamed of giving birth with my husband present, and here I was allowed to," said Olessya Mlkhereva, who recently gave birth at the Astana City Maternity Hospital #1 in Kazakhstan's capital city. "The medical personnel helped us through it all."

Having family members present during birth and other changes were recently introduced at maternity hospitals and wards in Astana with support from the USAID Health Reform project. The project has been introducing improvements to the quality of care for mothers and newborns in Astana since 2005.

USAID has helped measure the quality of care at the city's hospitals by establishing indicators, creating client surveys, and setting up a monitoring team to work with head physicians. Initial surveys in the city's hospitals revealed a number of areas that could use improvement: new mothers lacked information on family planning options, the hospitals did not adequately prevent hypothermia in newborns, and only 10 percent of women were giving birth with family members present.

To address these issues, USAID organized a working group and trained a number of gynecologists, midwives, and nurses from maternity wards and primary care facilities. Information stands were erected in each facility to increase women's awareness of contraception they could use after delivery. To further encourage participation of family members during birth, hospital rooms were remodeled so that they offer more privacy and a friendlier environment for their patients and their family members.

"The greatest challenge was to change attitudes among the hospital staff," said Anara Kusainova, an obstetrician-gynecologist. "Employees were scared to reveal problems or to participate in discussions for fear of being fired. Now the clinic staff understands that the quality of service depends on every member on the floor and that only through cooperative efforts can problems be solved."

Expectant mothers also appreciate the improvement. The number of women who bring family members to support them through the birth has doubled citywide to 18 to 20 percent.