Saving lives
with clean safe
care at birth

Soap Matters

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Ensuring Relevance

A message from Soapbox Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Wendy Graham, as we look back on 2017:

The Soapbox Collaborative was launched in March 2012 in response to an acknowledged gap in evidence and action to ensure clean, safe birth for women and newborns in low-income countries.

Our vision and activities to help fill this gap were focused essentially on the immediate term as we hoped and expected many other actors to contribute. We envisaged our role would be time-limited, and that our commitment to local, sustainable solutions would eventually lead to our “successful redundancy”. Five years on, it is certainly the case that the community of actors addressing clean birth has naturally increased and we are delighted to be working in close partnership with many of them.

We have not, however, become redundant – as seen in the requests we receive to join with others, and indeed new challenges have emerged in maternity units which impact on safety and well-being during childbirth, such as increasing antimicrobial resistance, rising caesarean section rates, and a changing risk profile among some women presenting for delivery.

In 2017, The Soapbox Collaborative has taken stock of its contribution during the first five years and the potential for a continuing, relevant and appropriate role, particularly given the emerging challenges. This strategic review process has involved both internal and external consultation, and has reached a firm conclusion – Soapbox must continue, must focus on relevant priorities, and must work collaboratively.

Early in 2018 we will make public our new Strategic Plan for the next five years and we warmly invite you to “watch this space for more”!

Recent Publications


The Latest on WASH Indicators

Soapbox was invited to attend a meeting in Geneva at the end of July on the development of indicators focusing on the state of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in the delivery room. The meeting took place as part of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme WASH in Healthcare Facilities (HCFs) work.

The meeting was attended by a number of experts from the WASH in HCFs Monitoring Task Team covering the fields of WASH, maternal health, and infection prevention and control. During the meeting it was recognised that, along with the first four indicators on basic water supply, sanitation, hygiene provisions, and waste management, it was also critical to capture evidence on environmental cleanliness.

Given Soapbox’s focus on both maternal health and environmental cleanliness and our background in needs assessment/survey development, we offered to develop a fifth core indicator in this area.

The indicators were developed in partnership with WaterAid and in October, we joined a webinar to share updates of this work and discuss next steps. An overview of each of the indicators for the delivery room was provided, with Soapbox presenting on the environmental cleaning indicators. A discussion followed around the indicators, their focus and wording, and methodological issues. Updates were provided on current monitoring activities and opportunities to pilot the delivery room indicators from other members of the Task Team, representing a range of organisations, NGOs and academic institutions. Next steps involve finalising the indicators based on the Task Team’s feedback and revising them for application in the health facility general service area.

We were delighted to have been able to contribute to such important work on developing global indicators to monitor basic standards and look forward to continuing to work together with the rest of the Task Team on their development.
Soapbox at the HSJ Awards

Soapboxers Giorgia Gon and Susannah Woodd on the feasibility of using pre-prepared birth kits in labour wards to improve hygiene and workflow. It was good to network afterwards with others doing related work.

Where Science Meets Policy

Soapboxer Sandra Virgo reports on her recent trip to North Carolina…

From 16th – 20th October I attended the conference, Water & Health: Where Science Meets Policy, at the University of North Carolina (UNC). As Soapbox is based on a fusion of research and action, this was right up our street, and we had been invited to appear at two side events.

North Carolina is the site of the “Research Triangle”, an area between the cities of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill where several universities and hi-tech companies sit. From the airport, our cab driver managed to drop a fellow conference-goer and me at the wrong hotel. However, the hotel manager (one Amelia Shaw) generously offered to give us a lift to the right hotel “as I live just up the road”.

The next morning at the conference I presented at an event convened by Save the Children entitled WaSH for Maternal & Neonatal Health: Behaviors, Birth Kits, and Indicators. I described the work done by fellow

Strategic Plan Meeting & Review

As Professor Graham noted in her opening words for the newsletter, over the last year and in consultation with advisors – both internal and external to Soapbox – we have taken stock of our progress to date and the Soapbox 2018-2022 Strategic Plan has been developed.

The plan builds on five years of prior work on clean safe birth with international, national and local partners and sets out a strategy for the next five years, for playing our specific role in preventing healthcare-associated infections and the deaths of mothers and newborns.

October saw the team come together at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to review the draft Plan and activity areas and begin the process of creating an accompanying Operational Guide to be published early 2018.

Not only did the meeting provide an opportunity to work together on the plan, but also an opportunity to introduce and welcome Emma Morrison as our new Operations Manager. Emma has been with Soapbox since January 2016 in her previous role as Scientific Project Officer.