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Traditional birth attendants and maternal mortality in Ghana

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Abstract

Maternal mortality is high in most African countries, particularly in rural areas where access to formal health care is limited. The sociopolitical and economic environment complicates the medical factors directly responsible for this high rate. Since the 1970s many African countries have addressed this problem by training traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in health promotion and in the basics of safe delivery and referral. The Danfa Rural Health Project in Ghana has trained and supervised TBAs since 1973. It is located relatively close to the health services of the capital city of Accra, providing an ideal environment for the practice of trained TBAs. Thirty-seven trained TBAs currently practice in the area. Most provide patient education and encourage women to go to the health center for preventive services. However, many report routinely performing the high risk deliveries that they have been taught to refer to higher level care and that when they do refer, their patients may not go. Reasons for referral refusal frequently cited by TBAs include financial limitation or lack of transportation and the patients fear of disrespectful or painful treatment from medical personnel. In the rural environment, the

disrespectful or painful treatment from medical personnel. In the rural environment, the trained TBA's greatest contribution to lower maternal mortality rates may lie in the area of health promotion rather than disease intervention.



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Keywords

maternal mortality; traditional birth attendant; rural health care

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