

Medics4Timbuktu (M4T)

Beginnings

When Hay-on-Wye was chosen to be the Twin for Timbuktu in 2007 the health centre was approached by the Hay2Timbuktu charity to see if there was any interest in setting up a group as part of this to look at health issues as part of the twinning. The group was named Medics4Timbuktu and was to function under the umbrella of the main charity working on specific health related projects.

Initial visits and planning

In early 2008 three doctors and a medical secretary from the health centre were part of a visit to Timbuktu to meet and share experiences with the people of Timbuktu. We were able to meet health professionals in Timbuktu, visit the hospital and a CSCOM (the equivalent of a local health centre) and learn about some of the major difficulties and health issues the town faced.



Later in 2008 a return visit was arranged when the medical director of Timbuktu and director of a well established NGO (Non Governmental organisation) in Timbuktu called AMSS (Association Malienne pour la survie au Sahel) spent time in the health facilities around Hay-on-Wye and discussed how the people of Hay could help support the work of health provision in Timbuktu. One of the main health issues identified was the stark difference in maternal mortality between the two towns and this is where we decided to focus our support. Timbuktu had well trained health professionals and their CSCOMs were staffed and had basic equipment but they were not well attended by the women locally. Most of this was due to a lack of understanding of how routine checks during pregnancy could help improve outcomes.

Maternal Health Project

The Maternal health project we set up initially was to look at improving understanding and education within the local population around one of the three CSCOMs. The area was called Bellafarandi. The project aimed to train local people (who were picked from the community as people who would be respected- called motivators) and send them out into the markets, community, groups to explain to both men and women how having regular checks during pregnancy and coming to the clinic to give birth could reduce both maternal and child deaths and improve outcomes. The project also included an agreement with the local radio to broadcast regular health messages along the same lines to reinforce these ideas. Attendance figures at antenatal clinics and number of assisted births were recorded both before and during the project. The project was run through the NGO, AMSS who became our partner in Timbuktu and were invaluable in coordinating and delivering the project on the ground.

The project ran from 2009-2011 in Bellafarandi with fundraising locally and supported by a grant from Wales for Africa (via the Welsh Government) and showed a significant increase in attendance

Future project planning and extension of original project

In 2011 one doctor and medical secretary joined a delegation from Hay to Bamako to meet representatives there from Timbuktu and discuss the success of the initial health project and plan for the future.

Following this it was decided to extend the maternal health project to cover the other two CSCOMs in Kabare and Sankore as well as Bellafarandi. Supported by a further grant from Wales for Africa and much generosity from the people of Hay in response to local fundraising this project was planned to run from 2012-2015.

Hay-Timbuktu maternal health project 2012-2015

Aims

To reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the health districts of Bellafarandi, Kabare and Sankore in the city of Timbuktu through community education on life and the antenatal care, ensuring the financial barrier to care and improvement of antenatal services.

Objectives

1. To increase the rate of attendance at the first antenatal check from 60% to 100% in Bellafarandi and from 50% to 80% in Kabare and Sankore.
2. To increase the number of antenatal deliveries (by a qualified attendant) from 70% to 90% in Bellafarandi and from 50% to 70% in Kabare and Sankore.
3. To ensure availability of essential drugs, equipment, supplies, commodities (malaria ITN, contraceptives, vitamin A, antibiotics).
4. To improve the governance and management of the three health centres.

Objective	Activity	Results	Indicators	responsibility	Cost 2012	Cost 2013	Cost 2014
1,2,3,4	Schedule Antenatal Care of registration Card and registration fee for all women in the 3 areas	Number of women attending antenatal visits	M4T	AMSS	\$1000	\$1000	\$1000
1,2	Education sessions to local community	Number of women attending antenatal visits	AMSS	AMSS	\$500	\$500	\$500
4	Education sessions to health centre members	Number of health centre members trained	AMSS	AMSS	\$1000	\$1000	\$1000
1,2	Partnership with local health centres	Regular meetings on maternal health topics	AMSS	AMSS	\$500	\$500	\$500

1,2,3,4	Monitoring and reporting on activity and management of project	Results available	Production of annual reports	AMSS CSRF	1000	1000	1000
					6280	5295	4435

It was also agreed that M4T would fundraise to provide a motorbike ambulance for the town. With the increasing understanding of the importance of antenatal care and attending the clinics for help during giving birth, an increasing number of women needed assistance in getting to the clinics for medical care during childbirth.

Unfortunately the project had to be suspended in 2012 with the difficulties in Timbuktu and the money that would have funded the project was used to restock the CSCOMs after equipment was stolen. Thankfully it was able to restart after this.

Midwives visit to Hay-on-Wye

In 2013 we were able to host a visit of midwives from Timbuktu who came to spend time with our local midwives as well as shadow midwives at Hereford hospital. This enabled them to share experiences, improve understanding and learn from each other.



Motorbike Ambulance

The motorbike ambulance was delivered to Timbuktu in 2013.

This allowed women to be transported from health clinic and home to hospital when needed.

Adapted to work in the harsh conditions of sand/mud and needing little road maintenance . The drivers were picked by the mayor and trained by the provider of the motorbike ambulance 'eranger'.



Further expansion of health project

With ongoing success of the maternal health project and its mode of delivery, the project was extended from 2015-2016 to include extra information and education on early neonatal and child health as well as reinforcing the maternal health messages. This was carried out at all three of the clinics.

It was felt that the number of women coming to the clinics had increased enough that it was being seen as much more the normal for all women when pregnant. Women that had been through the clinic were able to feed back positively to other women and the numbers accepting regular care continued to increase.

Providing equipment for the CSCOMs

We were also able in 2017 to send out £1500 to each CSCOM to purchase vital equipment that each needed. This was sourced locally and chosen by each individual centre.

We also provided each centre with a laptop which helped support the centres work, improve communication and aid education.



Midwife training

With the success of the education health projects leading to increasing number of patients attending the clinics, the next step was to look at training more midwives locally to help.

It was agreed that M4T would fund the training of two midwives in Timbuktu from 2017-2020 and raised the funds to do this. M4T funds completed the training of these initial two midwives.

This training tied in with one of the ongoing initiatives from the main Hay2Timbuktu charity which had been supporting girls being able to stay on in education in school .

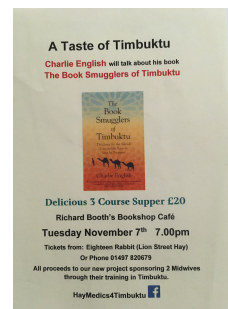
Medics4Timbuktu group ran alongside Hay2Timbuktu until this point , organising its own fundraising for the health related projects, motorbike ambulance and equipment. As the focus moved to training midwives and specifically girls who had been funded through education by Hay2Timbuktu it seemed sensible to merge M4T completely into Hay2Timbuktu and cease to function as a separate unit.

Fundraising

Over the years M4T has done a huge variety of fundraising events locally and have always been well supported. Some of the highlights include

- Sponsored parachute jump
- Quiz night
- Market stalls
- Sponsored canalathon and cycle rides
- Calendars
- Childrens activity days at Hay festival
- Clothes auctions
- Annual African market (and Rachels cooking)
- Book talks (supported by Booths bookshop) (with Rachels cooking)
- Drumming workshop
- Music nights.

Whilst there have been many people who have been involved in various ways to make these events a success Rachel Giacconi (a local midwife and long term part of M4T) has to have a special mention for her tireless enthusiasm and amazing cooking/craft abilities that has been the backbone of many of these.



Volunteers and supporters of Medics4Timbuktu

None of the Medics4Timbuktu activities would have been possible without the fantastic help and support the group has had from many people in Hay and beyond. Many people have given their time and financial help to make these projects a success and been willing to be part of raising awareness of and befriending our twin town. To all of these we owe a big thank you.