

Learning package: Improving service quality

Strengthening collaboration between midwives to improve patient care

Midwifery Coordination Alliance Team meetings build peer relationships between midwives and enable professional development for reproductive, maternal and newborn health service delivery.

Effective reproductive, maternal and newborn health (RMNH) care, particularly in emergencies, depends upon high-level clinical skills and collaboration and communication between midwives. Midwifery Coordination Alliance Team (MCAT) meetings are a unique, Ministry of Health-developed approach to fostering peer relationships between midwives in Cambodia, while also reinforcing their clinical skills and decision-making capabilities. ‘We didn’t know how to identify serious symptoms [before the MCAT],’ explains midwife, Mom, who attended a MCAT in Tbong Khmom province. ‘This training helped us to understand the symptoms and manage them effectively.’

Over its five years, Partnering to Save Lives (PSL) supported MCATs for over 1,600 Cambodian midwives. The quarterly MCAT meetings brought together all midwives in an Operational District (OD) to meet, network, discuss complex cases, and refresh clinical

skills through interactive formats such as role play and simulation. The MCATs were also an opportunity to strengthen linkages between health centres and referral hospitals.

Each MCAT followed an agreed structure of four sessions, including team building, feedback from supervision/coaching, discussion about referred cases, and refresher training on selected topics. For the latter, PSL developed bespoke training modules that include diverse RMNH topics such as antenatal care, pre-eclampsia and eclampsia, active management of the third stage of labour, immediate newborn care, comprehensive abortion care (CAC).

Participants gave consistently positive feedback about the PSL-supported MCATs. In particular, participants indicated that the participatory approaches and clear explanations from facilitators were particularly valuable and effective as training approaches.



Credit: Marie Stopes International Cambodia

Above: Midwives from different health centres problem solve together, using clinical reasoning to determine the correct actions for managing a medical emergency.

“Because of this [MCAT] meeting, I have been able to save seven newborns and a number of women who had post-partum haemorrhage.”

Theany, health centre midwife,
Ratanak Kiri province

Strategies for success

After delivering RMNH MCATs across the northeast of Cambodia, and in 12 provinces specifically for CAC, PSL observed that the following elements were particularly successful in enabling an exchange of skills and knowledge between participants:

- **Participatory approaches**, such as simulation and group problem solving helped to improve midwives' skills and offered practical opportunities to practice and reinforce learning.
- **Bringing together midwives from health centres and referral hospitals with Provincial Health Department (PHD)/OD teams** helped to build relationships and teamwork and open lines of communication. This can strengthen emergency referrals systems and collaboration.
- **Practical, solution-focused content** refreshed midwives' knowledge on topics that can be applied immediately back at their health facility. This included clinical skills, reasoning and referral making, and administrative topics such as record keeping and reporting.
- **The Ministry of Health National MCAT Protocol** has helped to structure the meetings and provides clear instruction to facilitators. By jointly delivering MCATs with PSL, PHD/OD teams became more confident and skilled to deliver MCATs in future.

With these enablers in place, MCATs have helped to improve midwives' collaboration and learning, with many indicating that they would apply their new/ updated knowledge back at their health facility.



Credit: Marie Stopes International Cambodia

Above: A simulated patient lies on a bed as midwives discuss her treatment options at an MCAT training session

Future improvements

Despite the popularity and effectiveness of the MCATs, some limitations persist, including: insufficient time for practical refresher training, irregular attendance by referral hospital midwives, and a lack of sustainable funds for regular meetings that does not depend on donors. If these issues are addressed, MCATs can be held regularly, sustainably and with robust discussion and collaboration between midwives.

MCAT meetings are highly effective for skills development, and are consistently valued by midwives and PHD/OD. With sustained and regular meetings, MCATs can support continuous professional development for Cambodian midwives and enable higher quality RMNH service delivery for women and their newborns.

Recommendations

MCATs are an effective strategy for developing midwives' skills. For future programming, PSL makes the following recommendations:

- Advocate to align MCATs with future regulatory recommendations as mechanisms for clinical education or practice.
- Advocate for resources to be allocated to MCATs within government budgets and annual operating plans to support sustainable and regular MCAT meetings and elevate the importance of midwives' collaboration and professional development.
- Allocate sufficient time for practical training during MCATs. One half day is currently allocated for this, but a full day would allow greater opportunity for simulation and other skills practice
- Enable and encourage regular attendance at MCATs by midwives, particularly from referral hospitals. Cambodia's new legislative requirements for continuous professional development of healthcare providers may provide some impetus for this.

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