



SUCCESS STORY

Training to Reduce Maternal Mortality

Obstetric care courses provide doctors and nurses with new skills



Dr. Ayala, a graduate of USAID-sponsored courses, comforts a patient during labor at La Altagracia Maternity Hospital in Santo Domingo.

“Nurses are more dedicated to their patients, and are better equipped to identify problems, such as hemorrhages, and to manage drug administration. They are practicing preventative medicine,” says Dr. Cid, the hospital’s director.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

At nine o’clock on a Friday morning, 13 women are in labor at La Altagracia Maternity Hospital in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. In one corner of the delivery room, Regina, who is in labor with her fourth child, has started contractions. Despite the pain, she is comforted by her doctor’s gentle reassurances. She knows she is in good hands — her doctor is one of dozens of health care providers from seven city hospitals that have attended USAID-sponsored emergency obstetric care courses.

The initiative teaches doctors and nurses techniques for obstetric procedures, with the goal of lowering the country’s high maternal mortality rate. In 2002, there were 178 maternal deaths for every 100,000 births, mostly caused by preventable complications, such as infections or hemorrhaging. The training course provides health care professionals with the information they need to recognize and address certain situations immediately — when the right care and attention can make all the difference.

In addition, doctors and nurses learned how important it is to express empathy when communicating with patients. Partly as a result, La Altagracia has changed its policies to allow one family member to be present during birth, a practice that is not common in most public hospitals. Milkeida, who had her third child at La Altagracia, was impressed that the staff allowed her husband to accompany her. “I always get good doctors here,” she adds.

La Altagracia has become a model for other hospitals. In fact, many send their doctors and nurses there to learn how to provide care for their patients. “When they come, they see that they can provide much of the care themselves and under better conditions, because they have fewer patients,” says Dr. Luis Suárez, one of the program’s trainers.

Teamwork and moral at La Altagracia have improved since the training began. “There is more integration with the nursing personnel, to help them determine what their role is,” says Dr. Cid, the director of the hospital. On a whiteboard in one classroom, doctors and nurses have left messages about what they have learned. “We care,” reads one, while another declares, “We are motivated!” These new skills make all the difference in ensuring a safe start to motherhood.