



FIRST PERSON Helping Afghan Babies Breathe

Training in skilled neonatal resuscitation saves newborns



Photo Credit: USAID/HCI

“Suddenly, when I heard my baby’s cry, I was so happy and thankful for the doctor who saved my child’s life.”

—Shakila Mohammed

On the night of October 25th, 2011, Shakila Mohammad was admitted to Malalai Maternity Hospital already in labor. The next morning, she delivered a 3.6 kg female baby but the baby was not crying and had no response to drying or stimulation. Dr. Najmussama Shifajo suctioned the baby’s mouth and nose, and then began to resuscitate her with a bag and mask. Fortunately, the baby started breathing within the second minute of ventilation, and then cried aloud. “When the doctor told me that my baby had a problem with breathing, I thought maybe my baby would die,” said Shakila. “Suddenly when I heard my baby’s cry, I was so happy and thankful that the doctor saved my baby’s life.”

Dr. Shifajo was also happy with the successful outcome for Shakila’s daughter. Before she and other doctors at Malalai Hospital received resuscitation training in the Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) Course organized by the USAID-funded Health Care Improvement Project, asphyxiated babies were transferred to the neonatal ward for resuscitation. Doctors lost critical time in the first minute of life, referred to as “the Golden Minute” in the newborn care. The Project also provided seven locally-made newborn resuscitation tables for the hospital so that providers can resuscitate babies in the delivery room.

“After the training, I am able to resuscitate the babies by myself and in only a few cases, did I need to call the neonatologist. Since January 2010, I have resuscitated about 100 babies.” said Dr. Shifajo. As a HBB Trainer, Dr. Shifajo also provides resuscitation training to other staff at the hospital to improve outcomes for these newborns.

The World Health Organization estimates that about 1 million babies die each year of birth asphyxia. HBB is an initiative of the American Academy of Pediatrics and many partners, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The program is an evidence-based educational program to teach neonatal resuscitation techniques resource-limited settings.