

Title: Redefining Primary Healthcare for Neonatal Jaundice Management: A Capacity- Building Approach

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Background:

Neonatal jaundice (NNJ) is a leading cause of preventable neonatal morbidity and mortality, yet its early detection and management remain a challenge in primary healthcare (PHC) settings. The Wellbeing Foundation Africa (WBFA), through Project Oscar, is redefining PHC by strengthening the capacity of frontline healthcare workers (HCWs) to detect, manage, and refer NNJ cases effectively. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between PHCs and secondary healthcare facilities (HCFs) to improve neonatal outcomes.

Methods:

The project employed a multi-pronged methodology. Healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, and midwives, received training on Essential Newborn Care (ENC), with a focus on the early detection of neonatal jaundice using bilirubinometers and the prompt initiation of phototherapy prior to referral. Each of the twelve participating PHCs in Lagos State was equipped with bilirubinometers and phototherapy units to support early intervention. Referral pathways were strengthened through improved coordination with secondary healthcare facilities. The process was further reinforced with continuous mentorship and monitoring to ensure quality service delivery and sustainability.

Results:

- Increased HCW knowledge and confidence in NNJ detection and early intervention.
- Reduced delay in initiating phototherapy, leading to improved newborn outcomes.
- Strengthened PHC-HCF referral systems, ensuring timely management of severe NNJ cases.
- Sustained mentoring and monitoring driving continuous quality improvement.

Conclusion:

Redefining PHC through capacity-building, provision of essential neonatal care equipment, and enhanced referral pathways is critical to reducing NNJ-related complications and deaths. Scaling this approach across low-resource settings can significantly improve neonatal health outcomes and strengthen PHC resilience.