

Introduction: some general considerations

The kind of National Health Service descn'G'l in the ANC Health Policy Guidelines is the best vehicle to meet the challenge of maternal and child health in South Africa. It is based

on the district model and incorporates the Primary Health Care approach. By its nature and

philosoph the PHC approach places a high value on MCH. Among the ingredients essential or success in our context are:

. Community participation in planning & decision-making (clause 3.3.4). This should include participation in ethical debates such as the allocation of resources to various levels of care. There is already a commitment to accountability to local communities in the guidelines.

. Intersectoral collaboration at all levels & stages (clause 3.4). This should include an emphasis on the role of schools and pre-schools in education around health and the collection of relevant data. Intersectoral collaboration in all arms of development should be an explicit part of overall development and economic policy with the health services playing a co-ordinating role in relevant areas.

771: optimum use of human resources at the district, regional and national levels (clause 3.3. 10).

General economic policy should promote the equitable redistribution of national resources and should favour the health and development of the poor. Mothers or children should not be burdened in any way as a result of foreign debt or structural adjustment programmes.

Giving mothers and children priority in policy formulation

Like other people, mothers and children have the right to a standard of living and an environment that is safe, secure, and physically and emotionally nourishing. But children under 5 years old are particularly vulnerable and highly dependent on their mothers. They are not able to speak for themselves. They and their mothers should be seen as one. If they

are not allowed healthy development now the future of society as a whole will be damaged beyond repair.

Therefore the health and development of children under 5 and their mothers should be a national priority, and protection in times of conflict, and priority allocation of resources in

times of drought and economic hardship. This is not just a health-care issue.

We propose that clause 3.3.7 of the ANC Policy Guidelines on Health, 18-31 May 1992, should read: "The health service will give the highest priority to children under 5 years old and their mothers. Other disadvantaged groups, eg women, the elderly, the mentally ill and the disabled, will also receive priority. Appropriate services etc. "

Framework for service delivery

In the various stages of the cycle of life - from conception through pregnancy, birth, the

neonatal period, infancy, the preschool years (under 5), the school years and adolescence (up to 18 years) and back to conception - women, mothers and children have particular needs which must be met in an integrated and comprehensive way (including promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and custodial care) at primary, secondary and tertiary

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