

mothers2mothers

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Under Pressure: Generations of HIV Infected Babies

Each year, over 250,000 children die from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses. In the developing world, approximately 25% of mothers living with HIV will transmit the virus to their newborns. While the virus itself is physically devastating for both mother and child, the stigma women face in communities can be equally destructive. Without intervention, entire generations are at stake.

Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV/AIDS is almost entirely preventable. In the Western World, pediatric AIDS has virtually been eliminated. In comparison, a busy clinic in Africa will see more babies born with HIV in a single month than the combined total of the United States, Canada and England in a full year. Despite life-saving medicines, Africa's mother-to-child transmission rates remain dangerously and unacceptably high.

The Challenges:

- Limited knowledge of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent transmission to newborns
- Stigma and discrimination prevent women from getting tested, disclosing their status and adhering to medical treatment
- Lack of access to treatment during pregnancy, during labour and following birth
- Lack of education to choose and embrace safer feeding methods for their infants

The mothers2mothers Solution:

mothers2mothers was created to meet the needs of HIV-positive pregnant mothers seeking help at healthcare facilities providing prenatal care and prevention of mother to child (PMTCT) services. **m2m** is an organization designed to partner with existing health care systems. **m2m** trains and employs new mothers with HIV to provide education and support to their peers, empowering them to access life-saving treatment for their babies and themselves.

Succeeding Through Task-Shifting:

Sub-Saharan Africa is desperately short of doctors and nurses, but a remedy for these shortages exists - along with hope for millions of pregnant HIV-positive women and their unborn children. That remedy is not simply to train more doctors and nurses. Many would not work at home, opting instead to emigrate to rich countries. More than half the doctors trained in South Africa in the last 15 years are no longer practising in the country. Thirty percent of UK doctors are foreign-born, and U.S. health-care reforms will likely increase America's already large demand for medical staff from abroad. In any case, most hard-pressed African doctors and nurses do not have the training or time to help their patients deal with the misconceptions associated with an HIV-positive diagnosis. Many of these women are terrified that having HIV means that they or their unborn babies will inevitably die.

Instead, Africa should look to a policy that health care experts call "task-shifting": delegating tasks, where needed, to other appropriately trained health workers. An example is enlisting HIV-positive mothers (Mentor Mothers) to counsel pregnant women and explain how testing and treatment can ensure their babies are born healthy and that, if necessary, they too can get the medication they require.

At **mothers2mothers**, our Mentor Mothers, mothers who have recently given birth to healthy children after undergoing treatment to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission, are trained and employed as professional peer educators.

Mentor Mothers work side-by-side with doctors and nurses in health care facilities, and assume responsibility for ensuring that patients understand, accept and adhere to the interventions that are prescribed. The result is transformative – helping people to help themselves.

Succeeding Through Education and Empowerment:

mothers2mothers identifies new HIV-positive mothers, puts them through a rigorous formal training program, and returns them to clinics and maternity wards as “**Mentor Mothers.**” As Mentor Mothers, they educate new mothers, supporting them daily as they confront decisions that mean the difference between illness and health.

mothers2mothers

- Empowers pregnant women and new mothers living with HIV to become role models in their communities by promoting AIDS awareness, testing and services
- Fights the stigma associated with HIV by encouraging and supporting disclosure
- Conquers the devastation of orphans and vulnerable children by helping mothers access life sustaining ARVs

Our programs have **more than 150,000** client interactions per month empowering women to make healthy choices for themselves and their babies.

m2m currently employs nearly 1457 women at over **589 sites** in **South Africa, Lesotho, Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, Uganda and Tanzania.**