

## World Health Day

April 7, 1987 UNICEF AND THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION Offices throughout the world became smoke-free.

The anti-smoke campaign has been gathering momentum since last year when the Pan American Health Organization instituted a similar policy.

It was revealed that in the past year, lung cancer overtook breast cancer as a leading cancer killer among women and tobacco companies have been targeting women in their advertising campaigns in an attempt to maintain and increase sales.

The American Women's Medical Association launched a campaign to combat and discourage women from smoking while the World Bank pledged one million dollars to a «Safe Motherhood Fund» to be managed by WHO.

According to WHO one quarter of all deaths of women of child bearing age in developing countries occur during pregnancy or childbirth. Last year 99 percent of the half million women who died in pregnancy or childbirth were from developing countries.

Carbon monoxide in cigarettes reduces the capacity of blood to carry oxygen. Because of this, smoking is dangerous to unborn infants, and likely to be far more serious in the Third World, where anemia among women is widespread according to WHO.

Smoking also increases the health risks to non-smokers who inhale the smoke produced by others. «Smoking destroys people and wastes money on a gargantuan scale», Dr. C. Everett Koop, Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service said in a recent publication of the WHO. He has called for a society free of smoking by the year 2000 and has encouraged all countries to adopt the same goal.

The Office of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at Beirut University College has been smoke-free since its inception in 1973.

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## Education of Women and Health ☆

*My Name is Today* is a remarkable contribution to children all over the world. It was prepared by the Institute of Child Health, University of London, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of UNICEF. On the first page of the book, there is a warm and touching poem by Gabriela Mistral, the Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile:

*'We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The Child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer «Tomorrow». His name is «Today».'*

**Gabriela Mistral**  
Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile

The original draft of this book was prepared for a presentation to the Institute of Child Health given on the occasion when Professor Morley was presented with the King Faisal International Health Award for his work in primary health care.

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\* Morley, David and Lovel, Hermione, «Education of Woman and Health» in *My Name is Today*. Macmillan Publishers, 1986. 359 pages.

One of the chapters of the book deals with the impact of women's education on health. The education of girls is closely associated with a falling infant mortality and birth rate and improved nutrition. In our world four out of ten women are illiterate and in some African and Arab countries eight out of ten. The health and well being of the family is highly dependent on the literacy of the mother. Girl's school education is often not considered to be so necessary, and parents are sometimes unwilling to spend money on girls rather than on boys. So the investment which could improve life tomorrow is withdrawn to help cope with life today. Despite low levels in the past, education for girls is a change which is well under way. The proportion of 6 to 11-year-old girls who are enrolled in schools in the poorest half of the world has jumped from 34 per cent to 80 per cent in 1960. Recent studies have clearly established that the more educated the mother, the greater are the chances that her child will survive till five. A decrease in child mortality is more strongly and consistently related to the level of maternal education than any other easily measurable factor. Schooling seems to enhance a woman's ability to care for her children. Studies show that it is not because she is better off, less fatalistic, more knowledgeable about health, hygiene and especially nutrition, but because she is better equipped to make use of new ideas and institutions. Her status and power within the family are improved and she may be willing to abandon customs such as providing food for male adults at the expense of children.

For almost all children, the most important primary health worker is the mother. It is the mother's level of education and access to information which will decide whether or not she will give herself for a tetanus shot in pregnancy; whether she knows about the advantages of breast feeding, whether bouts of diarrhea will be treated by administering fluids and foods; and whether there will be an adequate interval between births. Too often resources are not available but female literacy increases both the demand for them and the chance of their being used when they become available.

Highly aware of the rate of social and functional illi-



teracy in the Arab region, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World has recently completed an action oriented program especially designed to meet the needs of social illiteracy of Arab women in the areas of health, child care, home management, civic education, family planning, nutrition, environment as well as legal rights. The Basic Living Skills Program is a unique innovative and comprehensive approach to family education and community development. It is a non-formal integrated program designed for illiterate and semi-literate women to be used by health and social workers and educators involved in community development.

The contents of the Basic Living Skills are simple self-explanatory learning materials in Arabic to maximize learning among women. The Basic Living Skills Kit contains 140 lessons each stating objectives of lesson, facts about the topic, and method of teaching. These are compiled in 8 volumes and cased in heavy cardboard jackets. Four hundred colored illustrations support the text which may be used as posters to supplement text, motivate discussion, or may be cut and used with a flannel board. Eighty-five slides in color and framed for easy use as well as 150 handouts to participants to reinforce learning in the areas of communicable diseases, childhood diseases and immunization schedules from the age of 2 to 12 years are included.