

FLIGHT FOR EVERY MOTHER: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

13 August 2013



Many months again, on a cold wintery day Ann-Marie and Louise from 28 Too Many met Dr Sophia Webster, a UK-based Obstetrician, to hear about her plans to help improve maternal health in Africa flying a small plane from Cape Town, South Africa to Newcastle, England. Sophia had a compelling vision and ambitious plans to make her incredible journey not just one of discovery her but also a life-saving one for many African women. We were thrilled and very humble that she chose 28 Too Many to be one of the seven charities she wanted to team up with to help raise awareness of the different aspects of maternal health.

28 Too Many is particularly pleased to be part of this exciting project as a number of maternal health concerns arising from female genital mutilation (FGM). In relation to the increased risk of childbirth complications, a WHO multi-country study, in which over 28,000 women participated, confirmed that women who had undergone FGM had a significantly increased risk of adverse events during childbirth. Higher incidences of caesarean section and post-partum haemorrhage were found in the women with Type I, II and III FGM compared to uncut women and the risk increased with the severity of the procedure. The consequences for women not giving birth in a hospital setting are likely to be even more severe (WHO, 2006). The high incidence of postpartum haemorrhage is particularly concerning where health services are poor or inaccessible (WHO, 2008).

The WHO also showed that death rates among newborn babies are higher to mothers who have had FGM. There was an increased need to resuscitate babies whose mothers had had FGM (66 per cent higher in women with Type III). The death rate among babies during and immediately after birth was also much higher for those born to mothers with FGM: 15 per cent higher in those with Type I; 32 per cent higher in those with Type II; and 55 per cent higher in those with Type III. The study estimated that FGM leads to an extra 1 to 2 perinatal deaths per 100 deliveries (WHO, 2006).

Another WHO-sponsored study is examining the association between FGM and obstetric fistulae. The pilot study indicated that there may be an association but the final results are not expected until the end of 2013. In addition, a multi-country modelling study was set up to estimate the increased costs in obstetric care due to increased obstetric complications as a result of FGM. The annual costs was estimated to be US\$ 3.7 million and ranged from 0.1 to 1% of government spending on health for women aged 15-45 years. (WHO, 2011)

These facts on FGM and maternal health plus the other equally alarming issues highlighted by the other charities involved in Flight for Every Mother show just why Sophia's mission is so important. Many of these issues can be addressed and by raising awareness as well as by delivering vital medical supplies and training Sophia can make a huge difference to the lives of many.

The journey began earlier this month, when Sophia and her co-pilot set out in a 4-seat Cessna aeroplane for her journey between the UK and South Africa via 25 African countries with frequent stops to enable visits to medical and midwifery units. At every unit, Sophia will offer a donation of essential medical equipment and facilitate practical teaching among local staff on how to recognise and manage patients who have the 3 most serious pregnancy complications: massive bleeding, serious infection and complications associated with very high blood pressure. She will learn the stories of the patients she encounters, and their carers. She will also visit local schools, and hopes to stimulate discussion within each country and beyond about the factors which influence the health of women during pregnancy and childbirth.

We wish Sophia, Ross (her co-pilot) and the team supporting them every success for their journey. It will be an amazing time and we look forward to many updates along the way. Sophia will be writing a regular [blog](#) during the trip and you can also follow her progress via a weekly newsletter.

If you would like to help in the campaign to end FGM please support the work of 28 Too Many and you can [donate](#) online or [contact us](#) if you would like to fundraise or volunteer.

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