



Dr Hernán Rodríguez (Cuba), UN Volunteer gynaecologist, is on duty at the Gabu Regional Hospital where he works with a young team of doctors. (UNV, 2014)

Strengthening capacity to improve maternal and child health

In Guinea-Bissau there is a shortage of human resources in all areas of reproductive health. The number of gynaecology/obstetrics specialists and midwives is inadequate. To address this issue, and in collaboration with United Nations Agencies in the framework of the H4+ Initiative to improve maternal and child health, eight UN Volunteer specialists in paediatrics, gynaecology, and anaesthesiology are serving with the World Health Organization (WHO).

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The primary function of these specialists is to support national and regional reference hospital teams in the organization of paediatric, gynaecology, and anaesthesiology services; to strengthen the capacity of doctors, midwives, and nurses working in the hospitals to practice emergency obstetric and neonatal care; and to conduct formative supervision in hospitals where there are no specialists, thereby reducing maternal mortality

and morbidity.

Four experts have arrived so far: two gynaecologists, a paediatrician, and an anaesthesiologist. The gynaecologist, Dr Elizabeth Marino (Argentina), is working at Simão Mendes Hospital in Bissau. Dr Marino is also an ecologist and animal advocate, but above all she is an advocate for life who dreamed of working as a doctor in Africa. Dr Hernán Rodríguez (Cuba), also a gynaecologist, is on duty at the Gabu Regional Hospital in Gabu, where he is working with a young team of doctors.

Dr Ramón Soto (Cuba), anaesthesiologist, is working at the National Simão Mendes Hospital. He has already worked in Bafata, Guinea-Bissau. Dr Rafaela Santos (Cuba), who has already worked in a Portuguese speaking country, Timor-Leste, is working in paediatric services and in the neonatal unit of the maternity ward at Simão Mendes Hospital.

Additionally, four other doctors are still expected in Guinea-Bissau: two paediatricians and two gynaecologists. During their stay, the volunteer doctors will pass on their skills and knowledge to their Bissau-Guinean colleagues to enable them to better respond to the country's health needs. The H4+ Initiative brings together six United Nations Agencies that play a leading role in helping countries to improve maternal and child health, and to accelerate progress toward achievement of the Millennium Development Goals to reduce infant mortality and improve maternal health.

Article translated from French by UN Online Volunteer Denise Pavao.

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