

Hello, again, and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. We invite you to listen carefully so that you can learn and improve your American English. Today we talk about health issues. First, we are off to Cameroon to hear how officials are turning against illegal hospitals and their workers. Then we head east to Ethiopia. Birth control is the subject there. We will have information about a program that aims to help recent mothers to keep from becoming pregnant again too quickly.

It is a whole new year, and we hope you will make a note to join us every day for "As It Is" on VOA.

Cameroon has begun a campaign against hospitals that offer treatment illegally in the country. The Ministry of Health says thousands of hospitals operating without legal permission are responsible for the deaths of many patients. The government says the campaign includes people who practice traditional Chinese medicine.

Twenty-seven-year-old Mirabel Ndi watches helplessly as her two-month-old baby cries in pain. The mother says she spent the whole night in a private clinic in Yaounde, but no medical workers were on duty.

“I came to the hospital and there is nobody to help. Nobody to help.”

Hospital workers have gone into hiding since the campaign against illegal medical centers began. Bijogo Atangana is secretary-general of Cameroon’s National Medical Council. He says the Council will continue to try to organize the hospitals.

He says hospitals are spreading across the country, many of them illegal. He says all doctors working in such places who are not members of the National Medical Council are acting illegally.

The government of Cameroon says it has already identified 600 illegal hospitals and health centers.

Andre Mama Fouda is Cameroon's minister of health. He says the government is targeting hospitals throughout the country and wants to close them if they lack legal permission to operate.

Dr. Etoundi Albert is one of the officials of the emergency group at the Central Hospital in Yaounde. He says just a few people are working there and they have far too much to do.

He says the hospital can handle as many as eight emergencies at a time. He says 20 cases needing less immediate care can be dealt with at one time. But he says it is very important that qualified medical workers are available to treat patients. And he says when an emergency takes place, the hospital should be able to react fast.

Dr. Nick Ngwanyam directs the Saint Louis Higher Institute of Health. The Institute trains medical workers. He praises steps being taken by the government to stop illegal hospitals as saving lives.

“When it comes to medicine, there is no room for mistakes and so the action is welcome. You go to the hospital, there is the doctor who is genuine. Then there is a nurse who is called doctor, the laboratory technician (who is called) doctor, then the nurse aid, doctor. And so doctor, which used to mean something, has become a generic name for somebody in a white coat.”

The government is also targeting illegal Chinese medical practitioners. Some Cameroonians suggest that the government should organize the practice of Chinese medicines in Cameroon instead of stopping it.

Daniel Kum sought help from a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. He praises his treatment. He says he moved from one hospital to another without being helped by the drugs he received. But he says when he took the Chinese medicine, his condition improved.

The World Health Organization says that 200- thousand deaths that could be prevented take place in the world each year. The Organization says this could NOT happen if people did not use phony, or false, drugs. Illegally operated hospitals supply most of these drugs.

And, the International Policy Network says false drugs for tuberculosis and malaria are estimated to kill 700-thousand people around the world every year.

## **Ethiopia Aims to Help New Mothers**

Thousands of people gathered recently in Ethiopia at the International Conference on Family Planning. Postpartum family planning services are meant to provide birth control for women after childbirth and during the first 12 months of motherhood. The goal is to prevent the new mothers from getting pregnant again too soon, which often has bad health effects for mother and child.

The United States International Development Agency operates postpartum family planning programs in 15 Asian and African countries, including Ethiopia. Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program Director Koki Agarwal says these programs are very important.

“So if these women were not to use family planning then they would have shortened birth intervals, which would mean higher risks of mortality for their child. So even 30 percent higher risks for children who were born when the intervals are less than three years.”

And, she said these mothers have problems with anemia and the ability to breastfeed their child. So the child may not get full nourishment.

The plan presented at the conference outlines a record keeping system of postpartum contraceptive use, easy-to-understand information materials for families, and proposed practices for health workers.

Nurse Tigest Yigezu works for one of the 16 health centers in Ethiopia that offers the postpartum family planning program. She does daily house visits to mothers who just gave birth, and tries to persuade families to use contraceptives.

She says there are no problems persuading families to use contraceptives for a short period of time. But, male partners mostly refuse long-term use. She says this is a cultural and religious issue, as children are seen as a blessing for the family.

Research shows that 95 percent of postpartum women around the world want to avoid another pregnancy for at least two years. Yet 65 percent do not use birth control. In Ethiopia, only 19 percent of women with newborn babies use contraceptives.

Shashemene Hospital Director Wihid Gebrehiwot says workers at his hospital began offering postpartum family planning services last year. He says the hospital has only been able to help 245 women because of limited resources.

Dr. Wihid says it is not clear how they will continue to provide free contraceptives if the Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program stops providing money.

Ethiopia has met the Millennium Development Goal target on child survival by reducing its under-five mortality rate by 67 percent in the past 20 years. More attention on postpartum family planning could further reduce the number of child deaths.

And that's all for this edition of "As It Is" on the Voice of America. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington, with a very short history lesson for this Thursday, the 16th of January. On this date in 1920, the 18th amendment to the United States Constitution went into effect, banning the drinking of alcohol. But 13 years later, prohibition came to an end!

Stay with us for more Learning English programs in just a few seconds. And there is world news at the beginning of the hour.





