

Healthcare professionals must recognize importance of human rights to improve healthcare for women

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Women's human rights need to be addressed globally in order to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity, says RCOG Vice President, Professor Lesley Regan, in her lecture tomorrow at the joint RCOG/RANZCOG World Congress in Brisbane, Australia.

Professor Regan's presentation 'Why mothers die: Women's [human rights](#)' focuses on the impact of human rights on women's reproductive health and the role of healthcare professionals in improving the status of women worldwide.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. By 2009, the UN Human Rights Council had acknowledged that preventable maternal mortality was a [human rights violation](#), and health advocates started using human rights mechanisms to make Governments honour their commitment to ensure access to services essential for reproductive health and wellbeing.

A human rights approach to women's healthcare is essential, notes Professor Regan. It not only provides valuable tools to hold Governments legally accountable to address the preventable causes of maternal death, but also allows for the distribution of resources and medicines, such as effective contraception and misoprostol to reduce postpartum haemorrhage, a leading cause of maternal mortality globally.

However, Professor Regan notes that far too many countries are turning a blind eye to a human rights approach, and gender inequalities and violence, including child marriage, rape and female genital mutilation are rife.

Healthcare professionals have an important role to play in tackling gender inequalities and domestic violence and are often the first and only point of contact for women to reach out to.

Professor Lesley Regan says:

"A critically important reason why global efforts to reduce [maternal mortality](#) and morbidity have been slow is the low value that society, political, religious, community and family leaders have placed on a woman's life.

"The contributions made by mothers to society are far reaching and countries that fail to protect women's rights have the worst economic, educational, maternal and child health outcomes.

"Advocacy for women is an obligation for everyone engaged in reproductive healthcare. It is therefore crucial that all healthcare professionals understand how to embed human rights principles into every aspect of their delivery of care.

"Women should know about their rights when accessing healthcare. We need to empower them with the knowledge they need to help us protect and preserve their fundamental rights."

Provided by Wiley

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