

Decreasing the maternal mortality rate in Ghana

September 10 2019



Credit: Brigham Young University

This past summer, students from the College of Life Sciences

Department of Public Health worked to lower the maternal mortality rate in Ghana by developing a new app that connects pregnant women with their healthcare worker, tracks their pregnancy schedule, and provides information on prenatal and postnatal care.

Maternal mortality rates across the world are staggeringly high, especially in developing countries. In 2015, the maternal mortality rate in developing countries was 239 per 100,000 [live births](#) with numbers increasing in rural communities, versus 12 per 100,000 live births in developed countries. These numbers have decreased in the last several years, but there is still a long way to go.

Naomi Rhondeau, a recent College of Life Sciences graduate from the Department of Public Health, was interested in [maternal health](#) as a student. When she learned about the maternal [health](#) disparities across the globe, she decided to do something about it. Rhondeau and a team of students created an app for Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) to assist in lowering Ghana's maternal mortality rate, a task the country has been tackling for the last four decades.

CHWs work in clinics and travel to rural communities to provide care. In most cases, one CHW oversees the care of 200-300 individuals, 40 to 50 of whom are pregnant women—a tall order for just one individual.



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Rhondeau and her team were brought together through the Social Venture Maternal Health Challenge at the BYU Ballard Center. Rhondeau's team began working on a project involving Ghana Health Services and Medic Mobile, an SMS text system that connects CHWs to their patients. The team first traveled to Ghana in the summer of 2018 to implement the pre-existing Medic Mobile service to assist CHWs in providing care for pregnant women. The project was successful, but the service could not run offline, which was critical as they were often visiting areas with no available network. This was a problem!

"We came back after that summer and we didn't want to quit," Rhondeau said. "We really loved the community that we had worked in ... so we wanted to come up with our own app [that addressed the problem]."

With insights gained from their first trip and existing mobile health solutions, Rhondeau and her team created Maame, an offline app that allows expectant mothers to track their pregnancy schedule.

Maame aims to reduce [maternal mortality rates](#) in [rural communities](#) and acts as a resource to provide proper prenatal and postnatal care. The app allows CHWs to upload and store a woman's information and then sends notifications for appointments and visits. Not only does the app seek to make scheduling more convenient, but it also acts as a guide and supplement for educating expecting mothers on topics related to their prenatal and postnatal care.



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After months of collaborating and creating the app, the students returned to Ghana this past summer to test the app and tailor it to the CHWs' needs. The following week, Rhondeau and her team led two different trainings with over 70 healthcare workers. The remaining time was used for follow-up and implementation.

Reflecting on the project and her trip to Ghana this past summer, Rhondeau described her and her teammates hope for the future: "We would love to expand the app to other areas. So, this really was a pilot

program for the next six months. Depending on how the healthcare workers like it and how much it actually helps them in their work, we are looking to expand it to other communities in Ghana."

Rhondeau encourages students to take opportunities that might be out of their comfort zone. Traveling to a foreign country was daunting, but working with healthcare workers and implementing an impactful resource in Ghana was an opportunity that she will never forget.

Provided by Brigham Young University

Citation: Decreasing the maternal mortality rate in Ghana (2019, September 10) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

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