

# Hope never dies

There is clearly an overwhelming need for treating far more women suffering from agonizing obstetric fistula.

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN,  
back from Cox's Bazar

Obstetric fistula is the most devastating and serious of all childbirth injuries. It happens because most mothers in poor countries give birth without any medical help. So many are young girls. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death and disability for women of reproductive age in these places.

After enduring days of agonizing, obstructed labour a woman's body is literally broken by childbirth. During labour contractions, the baby's head is constantly pushing against the mother's pelvic bone — causing tissue to die due to lack of blood flow to this area. All of that pushing creates a hole, or in medical terms a "fistula", between the birth passage and an internal organ such as the bladder or rectum. A woman cannot hold her urine, and sometimes bowel content as well.

A woman with fistula is usually rejected by her husband because of her inability to bear more children and her foul smell. She is shunned by her com-

munity and forced to live an isolated existence. These women suffer profound psychological trauma resulting from their utter loss of status and dignity, in addition to suffering constantly from their physical internal injury.

Lack of skilled care during pregnancy, delivery and post-natal period, lack of awareness regarding the danger signs of pregnancy and childbirth are the contributing factors of fistula.

There is huge number of fistula patients in Bangladesh. Experts estimate this number to be around 150,000 and it is increasing each year by around 3,000 new cases. Along with the government facilities, some NGOs are running clinics to treat fistula patients. Yet, the treatment facilities are inadequate to help heal all the women.

While mostly the treatment facilities are located in the division and district level, a hospital situated in Ramu of Cox's Bazar district is providing fistula operations to the women coming from remote areas and even from neighbouring countries. 'Hope Hospital (Cox's Bazar Hospital for Women and Children)' is established by Hope Foundation and sup-



PHOTO: TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

Fatima Begum (20), a fistula patient from Bangla Bazar, Ramu, Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh is waiting to be recovered after a surgery in the Hope Hospital.

ported by The Fistula Foundation.

It is really amazing to see the dedicated volunteer physicians and surgeons from abroad work in the hospital and get hands-on training. Dr Iftikher Mahmood, President of Hope Foundation mobilises the volunteer physicians for the poor patients.

As training is a vital component treating fistula cases, The Fistula Foundation sends trainer surgeon to increase the capacity of the centres they support globally.

Country Representative of Engender Health Dr A J Faisel said, "For a resource poor country like Bangladesh, awareness should be emphasised also to reduce fistula cases, where the rising number of patients are more than that of the total surgery performed each year."

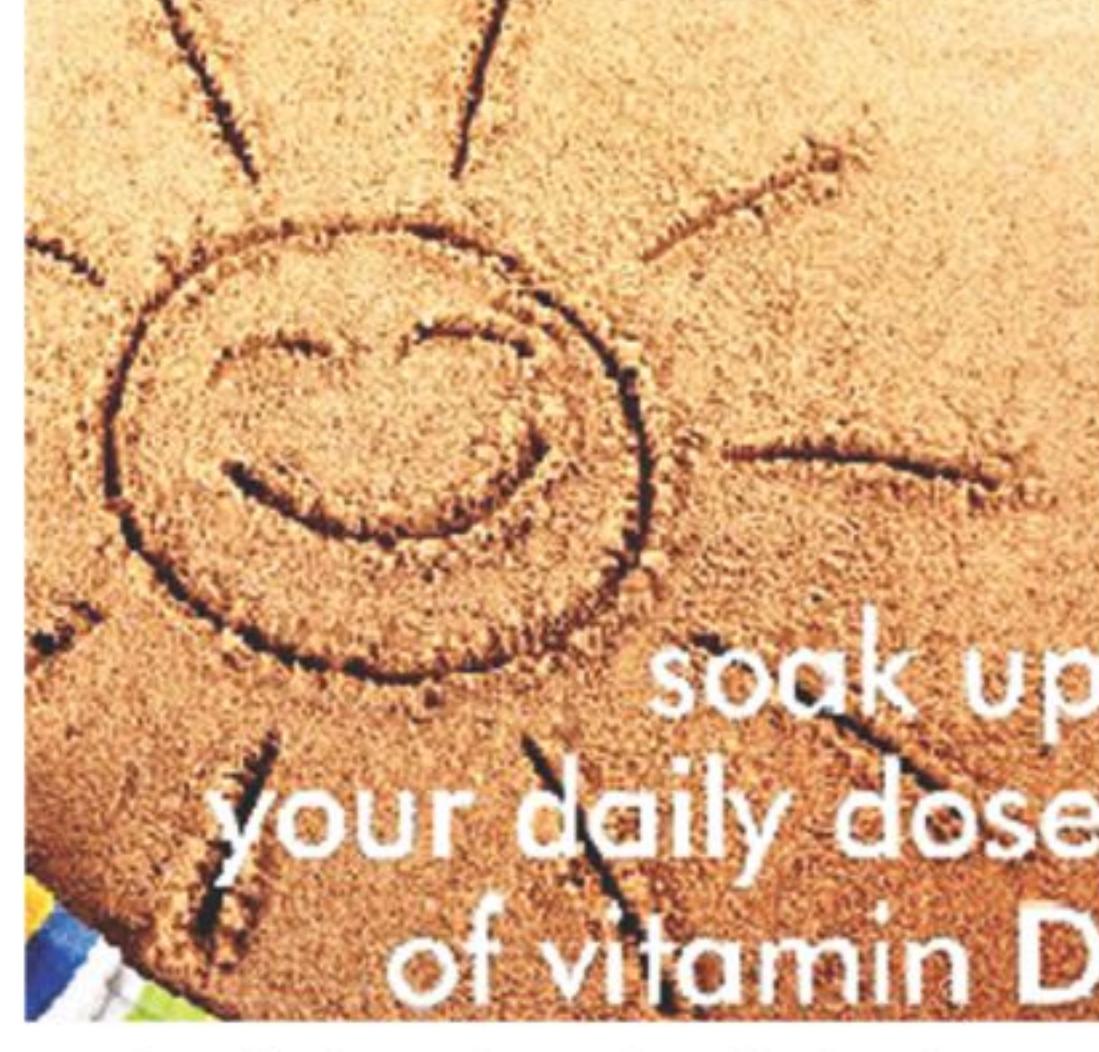
E-mail: [tareq.salahuddin@thedailystar.net](mailto:tareq.salahuddin@thedailystar.net)  
To see the photo story of the whole journey, visit the album "Hope never dies" in our facebook page or simply click the link <http://on.fb.me/T67dwa>

## HEALTH bulletin

### Menstrual cycle affects asthma

A woman's menstrual cycle affects the severity of respiratory symptoms, potentially worsening conditions such as asthma, a study published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine suggests.

Researchers said that hormone plays a role here and it may be possible to adapt women's medication to control asthma.



### Lack of Vitamin D in diabetics lead to clogged arteries

Diabetics with low levels of vitamin D commonly develop clogged arteries, which can result in heart disease, says a new study by researchers from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis published in the Journal of Biological Chemistry.

## WORLD PREMATURITY DAY

# Meeting the challenges to manage premature births

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

Prematurity or being born too soon, before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy is the world's single biggest cause of newborn death, and the second leading cause of all child deaths, after pneumonia. Many of these babies die within a few days after birth, many in course of their childhood and many others who survive face a lifetime disability, at a huge cost to family and the nation.

Bangladesh being among the top 10 countries with the greatest numbers (424,100) of preterm births, is facing the tough challenges to improve survival of the large number of these premature babies. The number is increasing along with the increase of global incidence of preterm birth, making prematurity an urgent priority for reaching Millennium Development Goal-4 (MDG-4) of reducing under 5 mortality by two-thirds within 2015.

In order to bring attention to the global challenge of preterm birth, second World Prematurity Day is being observed worldwide today and for the first time in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Neonatal Forum, Bangladesh Perinatal Society,



PHOTO: TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

ICDDR,B, WHO, Unicef and SNL & MCHIP programme of Save the Children, have jointly organised a seminar today at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) to raise awareness about prematurity highlighting the burden of preterm birth, informing on simple, proven cost-effective solutions, and invoking compassion for families who have experienced preterm birth.

Dr Sayed Rubayet, Senior Manager of Saving Newborn Lives (SNL) and Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) of Save the Children pointed out that prematurity is the biggest threat to newborn survival in Bangladesh. The challenges are huge but there are proven and cost-

effective solutions to meet them. Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) where the infant is held skin-to-skin on the mother's chest to keep warm can reduce the death by half in these babies specially those having low birth weight with almost no cost.

Preventing infections with proper and timely use of antibiotics and providing steroid injections to mother at risk of having premature labour are some inexpensive solutions to improve survival.

Creating mass awareness and simple training of healthcare workers to deal with premature babies are also important to save millions of newborn from early grave.

## Signs of heart attack in women

Signs of heart attack can be different than in men. Many women do not recognise those symptoms and thus cannot seek immediate treatment. Here are the symptoms:

- Having chest pain or discomfort.
- Feeling a strange sense of upper-body discomfort.
- Feeling short of breath.
- Suddenly breaking out in a cold sweat.
- Having an unusual sense of fatigue.
- Feeling light-headed or sudden dizziness.
- Feeling nauseated.

/StarHealthBD

## Knowing for better living

Drink plenty of water

Take fiber rich diet

Take lots of vegetables & fruits

Exercise regularly

Avoid foods that are rich in sugar & fat

Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol & soft drinks

Consult your Doctor

About 80% of people suffer from constipation at some time during their lives !



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