

SAFE BIRTH ENGAGES MOTHERS AS AMBASSADORS OF SAFE MOTHERHOOD

DRIVEN BY PURPOSE

In 2015, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in the Philippines was at 204 mothers dying per 100,000 live births—a far cry from the Millennium Development Goal-MMR target of 52 maternal deaths per 100,000 births by 2015. Despite government efforts to reduce maternal and infant mortalities, the country remains to be far behind the revised Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to reduce the global MMR to less than 70 per 100,000 live births. Sadly, about 11 Filipino women still die every day due to complications related to childbirth.

To help address this disturbing issue, Unilab opened its first SafeBirth clinic in Barangay Culiat, Quezon City, in October 2012, to answer the need for a clean, fully-equipped, and compliant birthing facility that can provide quality maternal care to mothers at a price they can afford. By leveraging financing from PhilHealth, mothers are now able to access the care of competent midwives and OB-Gynes according to their preferences and needs.

In line with its goal to help the Philippines reduce its maternal and infant mortality rates, SafeBirth has embarked on a Safe Motherhood advocacy, composed of three basic tenets namely, (1) regular pre-natal care, (2) skilled birth attendant, and (3) facility-based delivery.



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SafeBirth opened its first community-based clinic in 2012. It is now present in four urban poor areas in Quezon City—Culiat, Tatalon, Litex-Commonwealth and Novaliches Proper.

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SafeBirth mothers are empowered to seek regular and complete prenatal care from competent OB Gynes and midwives.

GROWTH THROUGH WORD OF MOUTH

Through the years, SafeBirth slowly gained the trust of mothers in the community. Through word of mouth, other

TEXT
SAFE BIRTH

PHOTOGRAPHY
SAFE BIRTH

GOODWILL

mothers came to know about it and its effective service. Clients would be referred by a cousin, a friend, an aunt, a neighbor, a landlady, up until the time SafeBirth top of the line service caught on. SafeBirth was able to build a relationship grounded on trust, which came from the mothers' actual experience of *Alagang SafeBirth*.

DIGITAL DISRUPTION

Now more than ever, social media has changed the Filipino consumers' behavior and lifestyle. Exploring the platform's potential, the SafeBirth Lying Clinic Facebook page was set up to increase awareness and capture patients for the clinic. True to its advocacy of pushing safe motherhood, SafeBirth developed and posted educational materials, infographics, videos, and other materials to guide mothers in their motherhood journey.

The use of social media has enabled Safebirth

to engage directly with its customers, and has likewise enabled its customers to engage with others. To serve customers better, the team has applied the 'word of mouth' idea online through the "Ito Ang Safe Motherhood Story Ko" campaign which empowers mothers to share their stories on how they have become living testimonies of safe motherhood.

HUSAY AT MALASAKIT CONTINUES

SafeBirth has now grown to a total of four branches all located near pockets of urban poor areas in Quezon City—Culiat, Tatalon, Litex-Commonwealth, and Novaliches proper. It has ensured the safety of more than 1,500 mother-and-baby dyads. Based on March 2017 data, 96% of patients in SafeBirth visited the clinic at least four times to avail themselves of prenatal care. Through regular checkup, the skilled providers are able to detect high-risk pregnancies. These



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The #ItoAngSafe MotherhoodStoryKo campaign was kicked off with SafeBirth's 1000th mother and baby dyad, Mommy Raquel and Baby Nathaniel.

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Safebirth's website houses the many stories from their #ItoAngSafeMotherhoodStoryKo campaign.

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SafeBirth nurses are stewards of Safe Motherhood, as they guide and remind mothers starting from prenatal check-ups until postnatal care. (From left to right) SafeBirth nurse Arlene Tañega, mother Eveliza Yuson, SafeBirth nurse Jamie Maido and Rodelyn Yuson.

THE SAFE BIRTH MOTHERS AND THEIR STORIES

The campaign started with SafeBirth's celebration of its 1,000th baby in October 2016. Raquel Lelis, 25, and a mother of three, shares how the facility's convenience, combined with the medical providers' care, encouraged her to seek regular prenatal checkup.

Linggo-linggo timetext ako ng midwife at kinakumusta. Laging sumasakit ang tiyan ko, at anytime pwede ko siyang i-text para magtanong. Sa iba kasi, kapa-kapa lang. Dito may nag-aasikaso, may natatanungan. Naging linggo-linggo ang checkup ko dahil sa maselan na pagbubuntis. Pero walang kumplikasyon at naging maayos ang pagbubuntis ko hanggang panganganak ko. Healthy ako at si baby.



SafeBirth has also been proven to be a cost-effective alternative to hospitals. Out of its present clients, 27% previously availed themselves of the maternity service in hospitals. Crizelle Constantino, 30, and a mother of two, had to look for other options when her family transferred to the metro as cost of living and other expenditures became increasingly high:

Kahit PhilHealth ay sila ang nag-asikaso. Dahil gusto ko kumpleto, lahat ng bakuna at pati expanded New Born Screening kinuha ko, para lahat ng posibleng sakit na sakop nito ay masuri ang aking anak na si Caden Radney. Kumpara sa Php 20,000 sa ospital, unabot lang ng Php13,000 ang binayaran ko. Kasama na roon ang midwife at OB-Gyne na nagpaanak sa akin, mga bakuna, Newborn Hearing, at Expanded Newborn Screening. Pati Birth Certificate sila na ang nag-asikaso! Kumpleto na.



Among SafeBirth's multigravida patients (mothers who are not first-time moms), 11% previously delivered their babies at home. Michelle Carandang, 24, delivered her first baby at home in 2012. She tells about what discouraged her from seeking care from public health centers:

Noong sinubukan ko magpa-check sa health center na may public lying-in, naabutan ko 'yung nanganganak. Siyempre madugo, tapos iyak nang iyak 'yung buntis. Parang natakot ako, kasi parang binabalewala siya. Ayoko nang gamun. Kaya sa una kong panganganak, sa bahay na ako inabutan. Naisip ng nanay ko na ipatawag si Nanay Myrna (midwife) dahil siya ang nagpaanak sa kaniya.

Dahil kampante na ako kay Nanay Myrna, sabi ko sa asawa ko gusto ko sa kaniya ulit manganak. Nasa SafeBirth na pala siya, at doon ko nalaman na barwal na palang magpa-anak sa bahay. Naging regular ang checkup ko. Kapag sobrang sakit ng tiyan ko madali lang tumawag ng OB. Puwedeng pumunta doon, at madali lang din makontak at matext si Nanay Myrna at ang staff. Naaalagaan ako nang mabuti.

The staff and medical providers of SafeBirth would even go beyond the call of duty as staunch advocates of maternal and child health. In SafeBirth only breastfeeding is allowed. Arlene Tañega, 27, went from being a SafeBirth nurse to becoming a wet nurse.

Dahil sa karanasan ko, hinihikayat ko talaga lahat ng nanay na mag-Exclusive Breastfeeding. Noong mga panahong 'yon nagpapadede pa rin ako sa anak ko pero siyempre kapag duty napupuno ng gatas ang dibdib ko. Naisip ko bakit hindi ko i-offer sa mga nanay na nanganganak sa SafeBirth na padedehen ang mga anak nila, lalo na 'yung mga nahahirapan mag-breastfeed. Minsan kasi yung baby iyak nang iyak dahil gutom na. Kaya sa akin muna sususo, hanggang sa magkagatas na ang nanay nila.

Alona Garay, 29, and a mother of four, is also very concerned with health hazards posed by public facilities:

Kapag nakikita ko kasi ang sitwasyon sa center o sa ibang ospital, nag-aalangan ako kasi minsan andun din ang mga matatanda, may ubo at iba pang sakit, halo-halo na. Naaawa ako sa mga nanay na matagal nakaupo at naghihintay. Siyempre mas gusto kong safe ang baby ko at hindi rin nasasayang ang oras ko. Kung mababa kasi ang immune system ng baby mo at mahawa siya, doble pag-aalala at gastos pa.



While Rose Lyn Clemente, 29, recalls her traumatic experience in a public hospital:

Sa check-up pa lang kailangan 4 A.M. gising na kasi dapat 6 A.M. nakapila ka na. Sobrang haba ng pila, kahit 7 A.M. pa sila magpapapasok. May cut-off pa iyon, kaya kapag hindi ka umabot babalik ka pa sa ibang araw. Matatapos ka sa check-up tanghali na. Hindi ko rin nagustuhan kung paano makitungo ang mga doktor at nurse sa amin. Hindi sila maingat sa pagsasalita. May nagtanong na, "O ano, manganganak ka pa ba?" sa tonong hindi ko nagustuhan. Sabi ng iba nagpapalakas lang daw ng loob pero siyempre kapag bago kang ina at

nahahirapan ka hindi mo magugustuhan 'yon. Mga three to four kaming sharing sa isang kama. Ang asawa ko sa parking lot natutulog kasama ang ibang mga asawa ng mga nanganak. Mahalaga sana sa akin noon na may makasama, pero hindi puwede. Naiiyak na lang ako noon. Sabi nila kapag sa public (hospital) ka raw nanganak wala kang karapatan magreklamo.

Sobrang thankful ako na napunta ako sa SafeBirth. Ngayon may isang OB na nakatutok sa pag-aalaga sa akin. Kahit 10 p.m. na ako mag-text o tumawag sumasagot pa rin siya. Napakahirap magbuntis, at malaking ginharwa kapag magaling mag-alaga ang lying-in mo.



high-risk patients are referred to a higher level facility which can provide them the needed care.

All babies born at Safebirth undergo newborn screening, hearing tests, and well-baby care.

As a testament to its adherence to quality standards, all four Safebirth clinics were awarded with the Seal of Excellence by the Quezon City local government.

It is with high hopes that SafeBirth continues to improve health seeking behavior of women in the communities that it serves. It is through creating sustainable and scalable solutions, with the open mind to welcome challenges and adapt to and answer the need of the ever-changing market that we create meaningful and lasting impact to the society. **B**