In February, 2002, the Minister of Health and Population, the Honourable Yusuf H. Mwawa, M.P., launched a new National Reproductive Health Programme. The purpose of the programme is to promote, through informed choice, safer reproductive health practices by men, women and young people, including increased use of high-quality, accessible reproductive health services. These reproductive health services are delivered through the public sector, CHAM facilities, non-governmental organisations, private providers, and others as a part of the nation’s primary health care system. This brochure summarises the importance of reproductive health, describes the RH situation in the country, explains the components of the programme and describes how services are provided.

**Why Is Reproductive Health Important?**

The provision of high-quality, comprehensive and accessible reproductive health services is essential to the well-being of individuals and families. Reproductive health implies that people can have a satisfying and safe life, free from disease, and with the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to have children. It means that women, men and youth will have the knowledge, the motivation, the access to services, and the commodities they need to make safe and responsible sexual decisions. High-quality and effective reproductive health services will:

- Help reduce infant and maternal mortality
- Promote choice, safety and equity in sexual decision making
- Prevent, treat and reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV
- Reduce harmful practices and sexual violence
- Provide emergency obstetric and post-abortion care

**Components of the Reproductive Health Programme**

In order to address the health problems described above, the Reproductive Health Unit is implementing a comprehensive programme with the following components:

- Safe Motherhood — to provide quality pre-natal care, safe deliveries, post-natal care and related services
- Adolescent Reproductive Health — to ensure that youth acquire the knowledge and the
friendly services they need as they enter into responsible adulthood

- Family Planning — so that infant and maternal mortality can be reduced and that all men and women can freely choose when to have children
- STI/HIV Prevention and Management — to prevent, detect and treat infections caused by STIs and HIV
- Cancer Screening and Treatment — to prevent, detect and treat cervical, breast and prostate cancers
- Harmful Practices and Violence — to reduce injury, disease and family breakdown

Programme Implementation

Reproductive health services are delivered as a part of the primary health care system of the Ministry of Health and Population. Clinical officers, nurses, midwives and community health workers are deployed at all levels of the health care system, and receive training, supervision and support from the Reproductive Health Unit. The Reproductive Health Unit and its collaborating partners provide pre-service and in-service training, drugs, supplies, equipment and technical supervision in support of the programme.

Summary

We must understand that reproductive health is a critical part of overall health. The problems that are caused when we do NOT have reproductive health—unintended pregnancies, illegal abortions, high levels of maternal mortality, rampant levels of sexually transmitted infection, HIV and AIDS, sexual exploitation and violence—are destructive of our social, emotional, and family well-being. Even though these are sensitive subjects, we must know that effective action is needed if we are to avoid problems that destroy our relationships and our families. We ask for your involvement and your support for a strong Reproductive Health Programme in Malawi.

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