

related to pregnancy, childbirth or the immediate post-partum period.

The campaign has three targets. One is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies: preventing unsafe abortion by providing couples with greater access to safe contraception could reduce maternal deaths by up to 13%, WHO estimates. The second target is to increase the proportion of childbirths assisted by qualified health personnel from the current 50–55% to 80% worldwide by 2005: this should help combat, for example, infection during and after delivery, which accounts for about 15% of maternal deaths, and also obstructed labour, which accounts for 8%. The third target is to ensure that more women have access to proper hospital care for complications of pregnancy, such as post-partum haemorrhage, which is linked to 25% of deaths, and convulsions due to high blood pressure, which causes about 12% of maternal deaths.

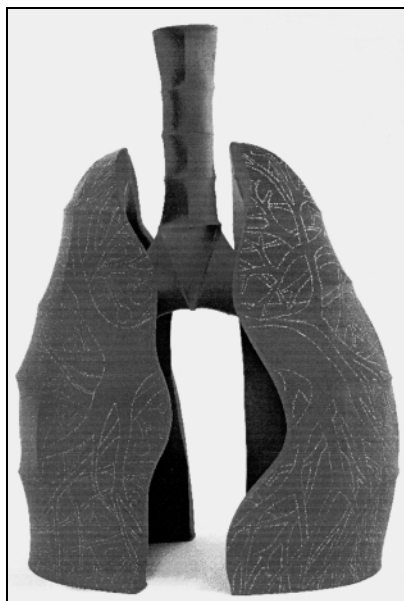
“We know that maternal mortality and morbidity are related to several factors,” Paul Van Look, director of WHO’s Department of Reproductive Health and Research, explained to the *Bulletin*. “Poverty is certainly an important one. We know, for example, that a woman in a family living on less than \$ 1 a day is 300 times more likely to die or fall ill during or after pregnancy than a woman who is better off.” Lack of education is another factor. “Health problems, of course, are also critical, and that is where we hope to make a significant difference.”

The WHO campaign will focus mainly on Africa and Asia, where the vast majority of maternal deaths occur. Ten countries will participate in an initial pilot phase — Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda, in WHO’s African region; Indonesia, in South-East Asia; the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, in the Western Pacific; Sudan, in the Eastern Mediterranean; and Bolivia, in the Americas.

What is new about the campaign, Dr Van Look said, is the fact that its targets are specific and its scope comprehensive. “Up to now, many countries have dealt with one or another of the three targets, putting, say, efforts into training skilled attendants but paying little attention to providing facilities where these attendants could send women who encounter life-threatening complications. Our aim is to make sure that all countries incorporate all three targets in their national health plans.” ■

John Maurice, *Bulletin*

Art inspired by tobacco



The sculpture of human lungs shown above is one of 20 exhibits by European artists, all inspired by the theme: Quitting smoking. This “SmokeArt” show, organized by WHO, was launched last November in London and will travel over the next 12 months to several European capitals. Posters of the exhibits will be distributed for display in doctors’ surgeries and pharmacies throughout Europe. ■

John Maurice, *Bulletin*

Obesity in children in developing countries — an expanding problem?

A WHO analysis of nutrition data from 94 developing countries has identified 21 countries where more than 5% of preschool children are overweight, as defined by WHO standards. Regional averages for overweight prevalence rates are highest for Latin America (4.4%), although Asia has the largest population of overweight children — 10.6 million or 60% of the total overweight children in developing countries. A country league table for overweight preschoolers would put Uzbekistan (14.4% overweight preschoolers) at the top, followed by Kiribati (11.1%), Algeria (9.2%) and Egypt (8.6%). Sixteen developing countries show a rising trend. The study was conducted by Mercedes de Onis and Monika Blössner of WHO’s Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, and published in the October 2000 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. ■

In Brief

World’s water supply and sanitation services called “shameful”

One quarter of the 4.8 billion people living in developing countries lack acceptable sources of water and a half lack adequate sanitation, according to a WHO and UNICEF report released last November. The report, titled *The global water supply and sanitation assessment 2000*, says 30% of water supplies are not functioning in Africa and 17% in Asia. This situation, says Richard Jolly, chair of the Geneva-based Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, in Switzerland, “is shameful, a scandal.” The report also notes that only about 35% of wastewater is treated in Asia, only 14% in Latin America and “a negligible percentage” in Africa. In large cities of developing countries, the report says, about 40% of rural water is unaccounted for. “Most of this water is simply lost before reaching the potential user.” ■