

Mary Nakate's First Days

Mary Nakate's entry into the world was trouble free. However within days of being born, she almost became one of the 2 million children who die in Uganda each year before reaching their first birthday.

Baby Mary Nakate is the first born child of Sarah, aged 23. Sarah's village is 30 kilometres from Kiwoko Hospital, so as most often happens in rural Uganda, Mary was delivered at her home with the support of a Traditional Birth Attendant.

Sarah recovered quickly from the birth, but baby Mary soon developed a fever. Older women in the village offered their experience and best advice. After the application of traditional herbs to the baby's umbilical cord, she continued to become more and more agitated. Finally she refused to breastfeed and cried to herself to the point of complete exhaustion.

Fearful of Mary's worsening state, Sarah made the journey to Kiwoko Hospital and was admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She was diagnosed with tetanus, a condition which is common in Uganda but rarely seen in the developed world in neonates. She was treated immediately with an anti-tetanus serum, sedatives, antibiotics and

anticonvulsants. Muscle spasms subsided after a week, and physiotherapy later helped rejuvenate her traumatised muscles.

To Sarah's joy, four weeks after admission Mary was breastfeeding, gaining weight and looking the picture of baby health! Without the assistance of the Neonatal ICU this little patient would never have been able to receive these life saving treatments.

Before Sarah returned to her village with baby Mary, the Nurses in the NICU spent time with her discussing how to avoid this happening with her next child. In some rural areas, it is common practice to cut umbilical cords with unsterilised knives or spades, and also to put herbal treatments on the cord, both of which can lead to tetanus. Sarah will return to her home not only with a healthy baby, but with knowledge that she will be able share with the other women of her village, thus reducing the chance of other little ones from this village contracting this disease.

