

## Health Promoter Practitioners and the “Birth Box”

By Concern America

In areas of Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia the health care providers who give daily care in hundreds of villages and towns are not doctors or nurses but rather health promoter practitioners. These amazing providers, most with less than three years of primary school, have been successfully trained as their communities' medical practitioners. They diagnose and treat patients, administer a wide range of medicines and even perform surgeries.

In the U.S., the term “health

promoter” often refers to individuals who provide health education and basic health care follow-up under the strict supervision of a medical doctor. In regions of Latin America, health promoter practitioners' depth of knowledge, skills and ability to provide primary health care—in their native languages—is comparable to the work of physician assistants and nurse practitioners in the U.S. As a result, in villages located hours away from health care centers and whose residents earn less than \$2.00/day, high-quality, low-cost health care is a reality, saving and sustaining innumerable lives while using few resources.

Dr. Kate Feibusch, a medical doctor with the organiza-

tion Concern America training health promoter practitioners in Guatemala since 2000, relates one success story:

“Three weeks after his last course, Pregnancy and Child Birth, there was a knock on Jose's door at midnight. It was a neighbor asking for help. His wife was in labor. Their village is a three-hour-hike to the road, and then a four-hour drive to the hospital. “I didn't want to go, because this man had made fun of my studies [to be a health promoter practitioner], but my father told me to go. He said, ‘What are you studying for if you don't go?’ When Jose arrived at the house, a thatch hut with no electricity and a dirt floor like all the others in the

village, he found the exhausted wife with a breech delivery. The body had come out, but the arms and head were stuck, as so often happens. ‘I was scared, but I just tried to remember the box.’

“During the Pregnancy and Child Birth course, every health promoter in the course came to the front of the class and ‘received a breech birth’ from the ‘birth box,’ allowing their hands to learn how to extract the head from the pelvis. ‘I just kept thinking, It's not a woman, it's a box,’ said Jose. Finally, he was able to free the baby's head, effectively saving the woman's life, and forever establishing his position as the village health care provider.”