

BAYER CARES FOUNDATION: ASPIRIN SOCIAL INNOVATION AWARD 2016

Baby scales for Africa

When it comes to patient data, most people think of blood counts, biopsies and analyses. However, particularly in developing countries, it can often be much more important for health professionals to know a child's weight, for example.

A doctor who doesn't know how heavy a baby is because he has no scales to weigh it cannot treat it effectively. Particularly in rural Africa, this is a huge problem. "But that's something we want to change," says Safoua El Ouahabi. "The lack of scales is one of the reasons for the poor health care in low-income countries, particularly for babies and infants."

An underweight baby, for example, requires special treatment. But doctors need to know its weight precisely. The dosage of many medicines, including antibiotics, malaria treatments and HIV medication, must be adjusted to the body weight to achieve the right effect and avoid excessive side effects. Underdosing and overdosing can both be extremely dangerous for small patients, depending on the disease in question.

This led El Ouahabi and her co-worker Khaoula Metheni to team up with the Swiss non-governmental organization Medicaments Pour Tous ("Medicines for all", MedPtous) to deliver baby scales to rural areas of Africa. What started out as a simple idea is having an enormous impact on the lives of countless children.

The Bayer Cares Foundation therefore awarded the 2016 Aspirin Social Innovation Award to the Baby Scales team in recognition of their initiative. The prize, endowed with EUR 20,000, is given to special social innovations that address health and nutrition. The aim is above all to support people who take ideas one step further and come up with clever solutions to tackle global challenges. People like Safoua El Ouahabi and Khaoula Metheni. "We believe that everyone can play a part in changing the



A better start in life: Safoua El Ouahabi (right) and Khaoula Metheni (center) had a simple idea that saves lives. They and Médicaments pour tous take baby scales to local helpers like Ben Kubai from Crown Healthcare in Kenya.

world a little," El Ouahabi says. This is why she got involved with the baby scales project to improve infant health in 2015. A low birth weight has long been considered one of the key factors in infant mortality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 20 million underweight babies are born worldwide, or 15.5 percent of all births, and almost 96 percent of these children are born in developing countries.

Thanks to MedPtous, functioning scales are ensuring that from this year on, doctors in Ken-

ya can determine babies' exact birth weight. So far, the organization has supplied twelve sets of scales to three Kenyan health centers and trained the staff in their use. They can now prescribe underweight children the correct doses of life-saving medicines. A collaboration in Tanzania is just getting off the ground, with more planned for Asia and Latin America. The Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) is supporting the project. The two organizations are currently jointly designing a study to provide scientific confirmation of the project's benefits.

Originally from France, El Ouahabi and Metheni work as quality managers for medical and health-related products at Bayer Pharmaceuticals (El Ouahabi) and Consumer Health (Metheni) in Basel, Switzerland. Global health is a long-standing concern for them. "MedPtous might only be a small organization with limited means, but we can still influence things and make a difference with good ideas," says El Ouahabi. "Our goal is to improve people's lives in the long term." ■

Grants4Impact

Grants4Impact (G4I) is a powerful new global unit created by the Bayer Foundations to promote innovation and ideas in the areas of health care and nutrition. The grants are used to support "world-changers", giving them the opportunity to grow and develop their projects within the context of a partnership with Bayer.