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Hesperian Releases New Book Focused on Activism and Women’s Health

Community groups around the world contribute proven strategies for creating lasting change

FEB. 15, 2015 – Hesperian Health Guides today released *Health Actions for Women: Practical Strategies to Mobilize for Change*, an innovative resource for communities working to improve women’s health and human rights.

This 352-page print book and online resource includes illustrated stories and activities that address the social, political and cultural obstacles that prevent women and girls from enjoying healthy lives.

Field-tested by community groups in 23 countries, the activities in *Health Actions for Women* are proven to help women and men facilitate community discussions and take steps to increase access to family planning, foster safe motherhood, address the harmful effects of restrictive gender roles, promote better sexual health, and ensure that health services meet the needs of women and girls — even in challenging settings where education and organizing for women’s and girls’ health may be difficult or dangerous.

The idea for the book was sparked by a conversation co-author Dr. Melissa Smith had with a group of midwives in Guatemala in 1996. Smith was leading a workshop on safe motherhood and family planning, field testing material for Hesperian’s *Where Women Have No Doctor*, which focuses on women’s health issues. The midwives loved it, but they wanted more.

“The indigenous midwives said the information in that book was very important, even lifesaving, but they needed strategies to raise awareness that the lives and health of women and girls mattered,” said Smith. “They wanted to learn how to organize and mobilize their communities, to advocate for the health and rights of women and girls.”

The new title is already considered a must-have for global outreach and training work. Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, called *Health Actions for Women* “a triumph,” adding, “No other resource today provides such concrete tools to engage communities and empower women of all ages to build lasting change from the ground up.”

Health Actions for Women also has been endorsed by Dr. Paul Farmer of Partners in Health, Judy Norsigian of Our Bodies Ourselves, and Nobel Prize winner Dr. Rigoberta Menchú Tum, among others.

More information – including book chapters and illustrations, advance praise, and information about Hesperian’s field-testing process with its global partners – is available online: hesperian.org/health-actions. For press inquiries or to request a sample copy of *Health Actions for Women*, please contact Robin Young, Marketing and Outreach Manager: robin@hesperian.org; 510-845-1447 ext. 214

About *Health Actions for Women* Authors

Sarah Shannon

Sarah Shannon became Executive Director of Hesperian Health Guides in 1996, after spending 15 years working on health and development issues in war-ravaged Central America. She pioneered Hesperian's collaborative book development model and expanded the boundaries of what is considered primary health care, leading Hesperian to work with grassroots groups internationally in the creation of health materials such as *Where Women Have No Doctor*, *A Health Handbook for Women with Disabilities*, the *Early Assistance Series for Children with Disabilities*, the *Community Guide to Environmental Health*, and the *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety*. Sarah was a founding member of the Peoples Health Movement, served several terms on its Global Steering Council, and is a recipient of the Ruth Roemer Social Justice Leader Award, the Dory Storms Child Survival Award, and the Mid-Career Award of the American Public Health Association International Health Section, among others.

Melissa Smith, MD

Dr. Melissa Smith is a family medicine physician who has worked in community health clinics in Austin, Texas since 1996. She also is a senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin, where she teaches a seminar on community participatory research on health disparities. Dr. Smith has helped develop reproductive health training programs for community health workers and midwives and practiced medicine in Nicaragua and Guatemala. She previously served as medical editor for Hesperian Health Guides' *Where Women Have No Doctor*. She received her B.A. from Harvard and M.D. from University of Washington. In 2012, Dr. Smith received the University of Washington School of Medicine Alumni Humanitarian Award.

Kathleen Vickery

Kathleen Vickery is a bilingual (English/Spanish) editor and translator with extensive experience developing materials related to health promotion, women's health, community-based medicine and health care, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. She has lived and worked for extended periods of time in Mexico, Chile, Ecuador and Cuba, and she holds an M.A. in Latin American Studies from Tulane University.

About Hesperian Health Guides | hesperian.org

Hesperian Health Guides is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing low-literacy health content in numerous formats and languages. We strive to support communities as they take action to improve their health and address underlying causes of poor health.

Beginning with the development of the classic *Where There Is No Doctor* in the mountains of Mexico in the early 1970s, Hesperian has developed and distributed health materials in more than 80 languages and in 221 countries and territories. Topics include primary care, women's health, early childhood development, environmental health, workplace health and safety, and HIV/AIDS.

Hundreds of government agencies and nonprofit organizations rely on Hesperian health guides to provide practical and comprehensive information that moves communities to take action on a wide range of health issues – from disability rights and women's health, to protecting local ecosystems and training the next generation of health workers.