

## The UN World Conjoined Twins Day—a call to global action

The UN has declared November 24 as World Conjoined Twins Day,<sup>1</sup> an initiative led by Saudi Arabia to raise global awareness about the medical and societal challenges faced by conjoined twins and their families. This rare condition occurs in approximately one in every 75 000 births, often resulting in miscarriage, stillbirth, or early death due to severe congenital disabilities.<sup>2</sup> For those who survive, the challenges are immense, as some conjoined twins share vital organs such as the heart, brain, or liver. Survival often depends on complex separation surgeries, for which success rates range from 50% to 90%, depending on the organs involved.<sup>3,4</sup>

Advances in preoperative planning, imaging, and surgical techniques have substantially improved outcomes in the past two decades.<sup>5</sup> However, postoperative care is equally important to provide ongoing support for physical rehabilitation, psychological wellbeing, and social integration. Beyond the medical difficulties, conjoined twins and their families frequently face social stigma, financial difficulties, and mental health struggles due to misconceptions and discrimination.<sup>6</sup> World Conjoined Twins Day aims to address these challenges by fostering understanding and compassion globally.

Saudi Arabia has played a pivotal role in the treatment of conjoined twins, with its medical team having reviewed 141 cases from 26 countries and successfully completing 61 separation surgeries. Remarkably, all medical expenses for these cases were fully covered by the Saudi Government. Building on this experience, Saudi Arabia is collaborating with the UN to establish an international registry documenting the global incidence of conjoined twins. This registry will standardise reporting, enhance research, and improve treatment by

fostering partnerships with national health ministries, medical institutions, and non-governmental organisations. The initiative will be funded by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief).

To further these efforts, KSrelief is organising the first International Conjoined Twins Separation Conference in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) on Nov 24–25, 2024. Cohosted by the Saudi Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs, the event will highlight both scientific advances and the need for coordinated humanitarian efforts. The participation of conjoined twins who have undergone successful separation surgeries will provide powerful testimonials about the impact of specialised medical care.

In the future, KSrelief and its partners plan to launch global awareness campaigns to educate the public about conjoined twins, dispel myths, and reduce stigma. These efforts will include documentaries, social media outreach, and school programmes. Specialist training programmes for surgeons and health-care professionals will be expanded to ensure more regions have the expertise to treat conjoined twins. The creation of multidisciplinary care teams, including surgeons, psychologists, social workers, and rehabilitation specialists, will help provide comprehensive care for both the medical and emotional needs of conjoined twins and their families.

Additionally, family support networks will be established to offer counselling and resources, while increased funding for research will focus on understanding the causes, improving preventive measures for conditions that lead to conjoined births, and advancing treatment options for conjoined twins. Advances in technology such as three-dimensional printing and virtual reality are expected to revolutionise preoperative planning and surgical precision.

A global fund is also envisioned to cover the costs of medical treatment and transportation for families who cannot afford specialised care.

Saudi Arabia aims to develop rapid response teams to provide critical care to conjoined twins born in areas with inadequate medical facilities.

Through these efforts, the establishment of World Conjoined Twins Day marks the beginning of a broad global initiative to improve the quality of life for conjoined twins and their families, transforming challenges into opportunities for compassion, innovation, and global solidarity.

We declare no competing interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Arab News. UN announces World Conjoined Twins Day after Saudi request. July 2, 2024. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2541841/saudi-arabia> (accessed July 7, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Martínez-Frías ML, Bermejo E, Mendioroz J, et al. Epidemiological and clinical analysis of a consecutive series of conjoined twins in Spain. *J Pediatr Surg* 2009; **44**: 811–20.

<sup>3</sup> Frawley G. Conjoined twins in 2020—state of the art and future directions. *Curr Opin Anaesthesiol* 2020; **33**: 381–87.

<sup>4</sup> Fallon SC, Olutoye OO. The surgical principles of conjoined twin separation. *Semin Perinatol* 2018; **42**: 386–92.

<sup>5</sup> Al Rabeeah A. Conjoined twins—past, present, and future. *J Pediatr Surg* 2006; **41**: 1000–04

<sup>6</sup> Carreker C, De Jong H, Javor V, et al. Family support and media considerations with conjoined twins. *Semin Perinatol* 2018; **42**: 393–401.

## North Abyei: the humanitarian and health crisis in Sudan

The Abyei Area Administration (Abyei) is disputed between Sudan and South Sudan, having experienced conflict and tensions over the last 18 years. Despite international efforts, this dispute remains unresolved. In June, 2011, an agreement was made to establish joint administration,<sup>1</sup> but this has not yet materialised. Currently, Khartoum (Sudan) manages the north region and Juba

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