



# Belly Woman Birth, Blood & Ebola: The Untold Story

By Benjamin Black

*Belly Woman is a testimony to one of the greatest health emergencies of modern times. It raises questions on the lessons not learnt and opportunities not taken for the Covid-19 era and exposes the global inequality of birth.*

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May, 2014. Sierra Leone is ranked the country with the highest death rate of pregnant women in the world. The same month Ebola crosses in from neighbouring Guinea. Arriving a few weeks later, Dr Benjamin Black unexpectedly finds himself at the centre of the largest ever Ebola outbreak.

From the impossible decisions of the maternity ward to the moral dilemmas of the Ebola Treatment Centres. One mistake, one error of judgment, could spell disaster. Every day the maternity ward receives women in critical conditions, often indistinguishable from deadly Ebola infections. As the epidemic encircles the hospital the stakes reach breaking point. What is safe? What is deadly? The team close the maternity ward, a devastating blow to women and health workers.

In the months that follow, Benjamin's journey collides with the epidemic's pivotal events. He recalls being present as the disease takes grip, spreading exponentially, colleagues get infected and the international response splutters into action. Returning after the epidemic, Benjamin reckons with the demons of the past, trying to help build a different, more resilient, future.

**Author:** Dr Benjamin Black is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist in London and a specialist advisor to international aid organisations. His focus on sexual, reproductive and maternal healthcare for populations in times of crisis has taken him to many countries. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic he provided frontline healthcare to pregnant women and supported international guidelines development. Benjamin also teaches medical teams around the world on improving sexual and reproductive health care to the most vulnerable people in the most challenging of environments.



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