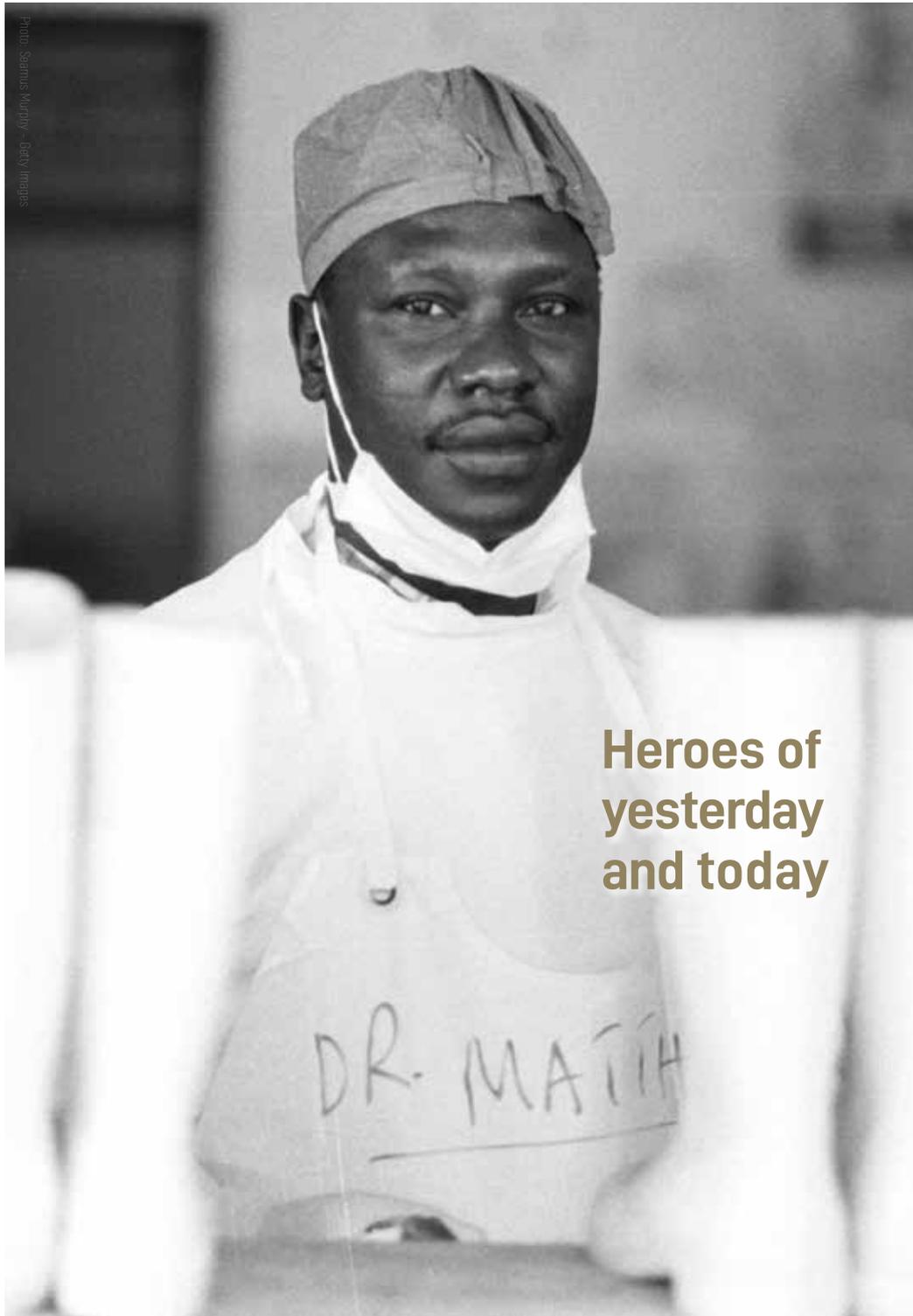


# News from Lacor



YEAR XVI NOVEMBER 2020 | N.4

# EDITORIAL

Dear friends,  
just a year ago we were celebrating Lacor's first 60 years together.

Today we gently tiptoe in your homes, to remind you that we are here, that we keep going, that neither you nor we are alone.

The alliance we started in Uganda many, many years ago, has been strengthened into a deep friendship. During these times that are so full of trouble for everyone, donors from across the world have received messages of solidarity from Lacor.

We have witnessed examples of resilience, the art of adapting to hardship, and even examples of heroism. This issue of News from Lacor brings you stories of the heroes of yesterday and today, together with the most heartfelt Christmas greetings. **May it be a year of health and serenity, both here and at Lacor.**

**From everyone at the Corti Foundation, Merry Christmas and Happy 2021.**

Daniela Condorelli  
Head of Communications  
Fondazione Corti, Italy

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Dr. Venice Omona, Head of the Children's Ward



## BEING A HERO MEANS...

### STRUGGLING WITH SCARCE RESOURCES TO TAKE CARE OF PATIENTS



Dr. Emmanuel Ochola, epidemiologist, Head of Department for HIV, Research and Documentation

Let us enter Lacor Hospital's gates and see it with new eyes. It is a huge, 500-bed structure, and cares for 250 thousand patients each year. It is as if the whole city of Verona was in need of care. The difference is that Italy counts almost 40 doctors for every ten thousand people, while Uganda has less than two. Indeed, **this African country is one of the 26 countries in the world that still faces the illnesses of poverty with less than three doctors for every thousand people.**

In Uganda, for every hundred thousand births, 375 mothers die and 48 children out of one thousand never reach the age of five. To understand the magnitude, in Italy only four women die in childbirth out of every hundred thousand, and three children of every thousand births will not make it to their 5th birthday. **Incredible**

**differences.** In one place, doctors can rely on cutting edge diagnostic investigations and readily available drugs. In the other, physicians must fight diseases mainly through their clinical skills and a basic supply system that seems to come in only drop by drop.

**Are these doctors, these nurses, heroes?** We'll let you decide after hearing the words of Dr. Emmanuel Ochola: "The most painful thing is that our children mostly suffer from preventable illnesses. Simple diseases, which are often fatal. Like malaria, pneumonia or infections that in Western world are far from being harmful.

It is painful to admit, but these are the evils that kill our babies. As a doctor, my heart fills with joy when I can help a child recover and smile again. Often

*Our doctors, nurses and midwives at Lacor are heroes.*

*They represent the Africa that studies, works, strives to excel with what they have.*

*And does not give up.*

though, I am frustrated, as I don't feel I have done enough. **Then I realize that the limitations of my country are to blame.** Limitations in diagnostic, in available treatments, in being able to follow up with a patient after an examination.

And the challenge becomes even harder if we go out of my hospital and look at Uganda as a health system. Lack of medicines, structures, staff, to the point where patients don't get an examination because too few are available. **As a doctor, I am not in the position to do my job as I'd wish for.**

Despite this, I keep trying my best: I tell my patients how to prevent the most widespread diseases, and I often find myself reaching into my pockets so that the patient can eat and buy some medicine. I have organized initiatives to improve the quality of care we offer, **I have marched through the city asking people to give support for the health of our youngest, and I took advantage of every opportunity to appeal to people's generosity**".

Opportunities like this one.

**Donate 45 €**  
to contribute  
to admission  
of a child with  
pneumonia

# BEING A HERO MEANS...



Dr. Venice Omona, Head of the Children's Ward

*18, sometimes 20 children need a blood transfusion each day. It's the first time Dr. Venice donates his blood. "What made me do it? Having to see one or two children dying every day for lack of blood. With just my donation I will save two or three lives. Blood should not be bought or made. It should be donated". If someone who saves lives is a hero, then one who donates blood is a hero.*

## RAISING SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILDREN TO GIVE THEM A FUTURE

Many of our nurses and midwives are the sole wage-earner in their family and they work hard to pay not only their own children's school fees, but also those of the extended family: orphans or children whose parents are sick or unemployed. What we consider as an exceptional or extreme generosity, here is common occurrence. Solidarity is extended to the entire village and to the community, maybe emphasized by the misery of the war.

**Every employee at Lacor supports seven or eight children with their salary**, which is about 120€ a month for a nurse. Ensuring coverage of the hospital's recurrent expenses which includes salaries, but also medicines and functioning diagnostics is therefore crucial.

To help Lacor's staff face the difficulties, feeling confident that

they will be able to guarantee food and education for children in their communities, **it is vital that the Corti Foundation keeps believing that the hospital's running costs are the most essential donation.**

Women and men employed at Lacor often bear an additional burden with resourcefulness. During the weekend or early in the morning before work, almost everyone goes to their fields to dig and care for their crops.

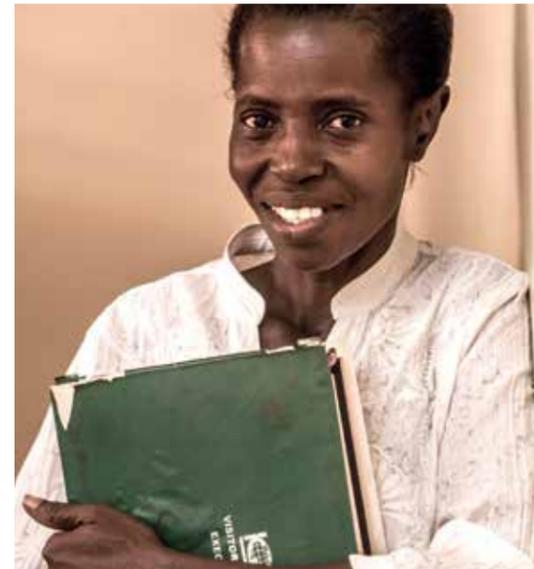
**Agnes, a health educator, grows and sells peanuts.** With resolve and commitment she has built a brick and mortar house next to the hut where she used to live, and where she now raises her nephews and other girls who are relatives.

**The story of Milly, executive secretary in Lacor, is meaningful:** "In 1996 I was Dr. Piero Corti and Dr. Lukwiya's secretary. Dr Corti was teaching me

Italian and how to format letters, but also to believe in myself. **"What do you want for your future?"** He used to ask me... and he would add **"go after it with everything you have"**. He offered me one of the small apartments inside the hospital where many employees lived, but I refused.

One day I picked up the courage to ask him for a loan of 300 thousand Ugandan shillings (about 70 euros). Dr. Corti spoke in Italian with Sister Lina, the Comboni nun that at the time was both matron and tutor, who asked me to follow her and gave me the money. Every month I would have to give back 40 thousand shillings".

Later Dr. Corti told me that **I was the first woman to ask for a loan to build a house.** Three months later I showed him pictures of my new house and I told him "doctor, this is why I refused to live within the hospital. Because I



Milly Ato, Executive Secretary



Agnes, Health Educator

would have never grown up."

It was probably the first loan from what would later become the Hospital Loan Cooperative which was founded in 1997 and has since loaned more than 6 million Ugandan shillings (more than ,3 million euros), allowing thousands of people the chance to buy some land, build their own house or send their children to school to give them a better future.

**Donate 120 €**  
for the monthly salary of a nurse

## Resilience is at home in Lacor

Resilience, the ability to take a blow without breaking, to adapt and thrive despite traumatic and deep changes. **It is a word well suited to Lacor and to the staff's strength in responding to challenges**, both in the past and today.

"The tenacity, the determination and the will to not give up that people of North Uganda have shown in the face of extraordinary hardship and suffering have been the subject of studies", explains Thomas Molteni, internal auditor at the hospital. "One of these was ECDPM's *Resilience and high performance amidst conflict, epidemics and extreme poverty: The Lacor Hospital, northern Uganda* and showed the ability to face difficult situations in a collective and innovative way". Other research

has shown that northern Uganda's young people have characteristics such as self-esteem, discipline and a developed social network that helps strengthen their resilience.

Even the widespread entrepreneurial creativity seems to have been a key element for recovery after the war. A vast array of business ideas flourish, mostly aimed at paying school fees, an investment on the future that comes with great sacrifices. Furthermore, the strong bonds of solidarity that characterize the local culture are an essential social capital that fosters economic growth. The countless loan schemes that coexist within the community are but one example. **Resilience itself is a strong indicator of future development.**

*"We can be tired, disheartened by the death of our loved ones, we can be afraid as human beings and at any moment consider the possibility of leaving. But if I leave now, I won't be able to exercise the medical profession any longer"*

*Matthew Lukwiya*



# BEING A HERO MEANS...

GIVING ONE'S OWN LIFE FOR OTHERS



On **December 5th, 2000**, Dr. Matthew Lukwiya died after contracting Ebola, a virus that causes hemorrhagic fever.

20 years later, the wound still feels as raw as if it had happened yesterday.

And hurts even more these days as the world is torn apart by another pandemic that is as frightening as Ebola was.

But **who was our beloved dr. Matthew**, the young doctor whose face now welcomes patients at the gates, smiling from the monument that portrays him together with Piero and Lucille Corti?

**He was a hero**, is the first thought that comes to mind. Where "hero" means a person of extraordinary virtue and courage, strong and fearless.

**An extraordinary man.** This was Dr. Matthew Lukwiya.

Extraordinary in his youth, one of the best students in the whole of Uganda, and as a young doctor when he turns down an invitation to remain in the UK after achieving a Master's Degree in



Tropical Paediatrics at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and goes back to serve his people.

He was born in Northern Uganda in 1957. Hard work and determination brought him as a young intern to St. Mary's Hospital Lacor. Here he became head of paediatrics and then Medical Director. And here he left his heart and life.

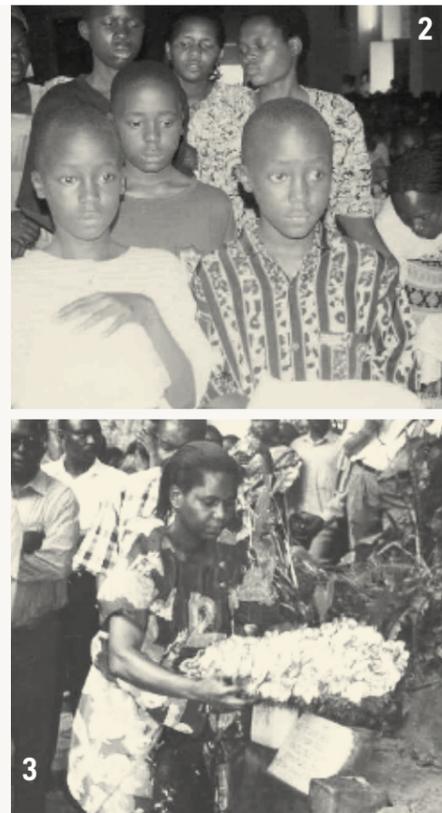
"To me, Lucille was the symbol of this hospital", Piero Corti declared at Dr. Matthew's funeral, "and then Matthew appeared, almost as if by magic. His task was to lead the hospital for another 30, 40, 50 years, as many as the Lord would have granted him. He was one of those people that can work night and day, day after day..." **Passionate, brave, devoted to his people to the point of risking his own life to save them.** During the bloodstained attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army, he took care of thousands of victims. During one of the rebel incursions within the hospital, in 1989, he gave himself up as a hostage, taking the place of the



Comboni sisters and of a few nurses, and was released only after more than a week had passed. **Dr Matthew was also a crucial member of the peace movement.**

In the summer of 2000, after completing a Master's in Public Health at Makerere University in Kampala, Dr. Matthew was called back urgently to investigate the death of two students from the Lacor nursing school. After examining the medical records, Matthew declared it was a viral hemorrhagic fever, probably caused by Ebola, and notified the government authorities. He organized a special isolation ward, trained the staff and inspired all with his courage. During a memorable speech (page 9) that resonates now more than ever, he convinced 100 health workers to risk their lives for the care and the transport of infected patients and for burial of the victims.

But it is not only Dr. Matthew's words that are alive today: even the protective strategies and devices, the suits and masks that can save the



Dr. Daniel Lukwiya

1. Dr. Matthew visiting an Ebola patient
2. His children, mother and wife, Margaret, attend Dr. Matthew's funeral ceremony
3. Margaret laying flowers on her husband's grave

## From father to son. A vocational heritage

"When I grow up? I will become a doctor, like my dad." Daniel Lukwiya's dream has become a reality: after achieving his medical degree, he is specializing in paediatrics.

"I was about 4 or 5, my father had just come back from work and had hanged his doctor's coat on the wall. I took it and I put it on. My mother was doing the washing as I was walking up and down the dusty veranda and, when she saw me, shouted "why are you dirtying your father's coat?" I replied: "but, mum, I'm a doctor: Dr. Lukwiya". So she said: "if you study hard enough, you will become a doctor."

Daniel has worked hard to reach his

goal. "It wasn't easy, but I always had my family behind me.

I still remember when my twin brother said **"there is and there always will be a way to make your dream come true"**.

Today Dr. Daniel faces the Covid-19 pandemic, 20 years after the Ebola outbreak that killed his father. "The 2000 Ebola outbreak made me stronger and gave me a purpose", he says.

"My father died too early, and after his death I felt the need to continue his work. I was so excited on the day of my graduation.

**I finally had the tools to carry on the work that my dad had started"**.

health worker's life are the same.

One night, after days of almost uninterrupted caring for the patients, Dr. Matthew was called to help with a seriously ill nurse, Simon Ajok.

He forgot to don the protective glasses and was infected. He was only 43 years old, leaving his wife Margaret and five children. A few days before dying a nurse heard him utter these words "God, I think I will die in my service: let me be the last". And so it was.

**At Lacor 13 health workers died in the struggle against Ebola, and Dr. Matthew was the last to die.** "He just was a hero" wrote Audiey Kao, MD, PhD, chief editor of the American Medical Association Journal of Ethics:

"The honorific title of *hero*... falls easily from our lips these days... Yet the true title of hero should be hard-won. It should capture the sacrifice of self-interest for the benefit of others. It should describe those whose actions surpass by far what duty demands".

**The commitment and bravery shown by Dr. Matthew contained the spread of the virus**, reducing the number of victims.

Even the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of Atlanta, a world-renowned United States national public health institute, recognized that many lives were saved thanks to his quick actions and his outbreak management actions both within and outside of the hospital.

**Another facet of heroism: heroes inspire others to follow.** Sister Dorina Tadiello, a Comboni Missionary nun, pays tribute to Dr. Lukwiya's high moral character in her book *Matthew Lukwiya, un medico martire di Ebola* (Matthew Lukwiya, medical doctor and Ebola martyr – EMI editor).

Sister Dorina, who worked alongside Dr. Matthew during the Ebola emergency, highlights the values that permeated his life: "Solidarity towards the most fragile, compassion in the face of pain, service, research and affirming truth".

She describes him as a **"simple, humble, open and welcoming person.** His characteristic smile", Sister Dorina writes, "and his sincere kindness do

not hide his strong personality, his moral stature, the sense of justice and his great love for peace.

**His sense of responsibility, his considerate and selfless commitment always stand out.** He never acts moved by personal gain. He can be credible and compelling because he lives first-hand what he's asking of others...

He has an innate ability to deal with conflict and to enhance the positive aspects of reality. He can be understanding, human, respectful, but at the same time he is a demanding teacher and professionally uncompromising. **In order to always offer the best."**

**The best to the greatest number of people, at the lowest possible cost.**

## We will do our part

"I will go where there is no road. The storm is very strong. It is bright as you all stand here today. You told me about the dark and when the time comes we will do our part.

We are all suffering... we are not free, we are not comfortable, **we cannot abandon the mission we have embraced for all our life: being doctors of Lacor.**

**This is the time in history when the hospital has to play its part, we must stay united.**

I could never leave this hospital because the mission of saving the most needy is greater than me.

I have never hesitated in helping patients when there were no protections, masks or anything else that could protect us from the bullets of the rebels. We were just thinking about how we could help our patients.

**This is the guiding principle of the hospital: that everyone, without distinction, be welcomed and cared for.**

I believe this is our greatest responsibility.

And I will go on until the end".

Matthew Lukwiya

# AND THEN THERE IS YOU



Lacor Hospital  
**STOP COVID**  
**DON'T STOP THE CARE**



Both victims and heroes. Far away yet as close as we have ever been.

Let's think about it. When we read the words of a mother who has tested positive for Covid, scared for her children who are alone at home, we can understand what she is going through. Now, more than ever. Because it is not an illness from remote lands, bearing a name that arouses no emotion. Now we face the same disease: same name, same symptoms, fears, strategies.

**Today the heroes are also those who keep striving for the more vulnerable,** despite the uncertainty within their

own homes and the radios spewing the numbers of the outbreak and the images of the city squares invaded by the marching crowds whose jobs and means of survival has been interrupted. Despite all this, you are heroes because you raise your eyes above beyond this and remember that you are not alone.

**Pandemic, global health,** these words find a new meaning: we are all in it together, 7.8 billion people all breathing in unison.

**With one substantial difference: Covid is highlighting the gaps and digging an ever deeper abyss between the**

**poor and the rich.**

What we can do is to reach out, like Lacor Hospital did with Ruth's children.

**Ruth Atim, head nurse of the surgical unit,** has three sons aged 16, 8 and 6. Ruth contracted the infection in September.

"I cried so much when I got the result confirming I was positive to Covid", she confides, "I cried for days, until a friend from Lacor encouraged me and told me I would make it. Friends and colleagues kept calling me for support. And when I was being treated

in Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, Lacor Hospital never left me alone. They bought food for my children, visited them and gave them precious psychological support".

Today, thankful for everyone's help, Ruth is back at work educating patients and colleagues on Covid prevention.

**But the hospital itself also needs support.** In order to keep protecting the health workers, to welcome and care for the ill to continue the teaching activities within the communities, to make sure that the peripheral health centers work at their best. Lacor

needs support **to put a stop to Covid, but not to the care.**

Every week Lacor Hospital needs funds to buy gloves, gowns, surgical masks and N95 masks. And then there are the drugs, the maintenance of the oxygen production system (the only one in Northern Uganda), and the distribution of HIV medicines in the villages, among many others.

In order to succeed, this year we call upon you to contribute together in a new, vital way. **Take part in our crowdfunding campaign: "Stop Covid, don't stop the care".** Donate, share, promote, help us

to reach the 20 thousand Euro goal. **You'll find it on [www.retedeldono.it](http://www.retedeldono.it).**

THANK YOU.

Search for  
**"Fondazione Corti"**  
in  
**[www.retedeldono.it](http://www.retedeldono.it)**

DONATE  
SHARE  
PROMOTE



# HOW TO HELP

## ■ UGANDA

### DONATE DIRECTLY TO LACOR HOSPITAL

Or cash with receipt from the administration office  
[www.lacorhospital.org](http://www.lacorhospital.org) - [info@lacorhospital.org](mailto:info@lacorhospital.org)



## ■ ITALY

### DONATE THROUGH FONDAZIONE CORTI

Tax benefits applicable to Italian taxpayers  
[www.fondazionecorti.it](http://www.fondazionecorti.it) - [info@fondazionecorti.it](mailto:info@fondazionecorti.it)



## ■ CANADA

### DONATE THROUGH TEASDALE-CORTI FOUNDATION

Tax benefits applicable to Canadian taxpayers  
[www.becomepart.org](http://www.becomepart.org) - [info@teasdalecorti.org](mailto:info@teasdalecorti.org)



## ■ USA

### DONATE THROUGH SOCIAL PROMISE

Tax benefits applicable to USA taxpayers  
[www.socialpromise.org](http://www.socialpromise.org) - [info@socialpromise.org](mailto:info@socialpromise.org)



**70 Euro**  
will pay for a child  
to be born at Lacor.

The amount includes  
the cost of a caesarean  
birth and the mother and  
child's stay in the hospital

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News from Lacor is a periodical issued by  
**Fondazione Piero e Lucille Corti Onlus**  
Piazza Velasca 6, 20122 Milan  
Inscription in the Registry of Legal Persons of the  
Prefecture of Milan  
Order no. 491, page. 870, vol. III.  
Legally recognized through Ministerial Decree 7-11-  
95 No. 75976 registered on 14-12-95 Registered at  
the Court of Milan under No. 750 12/12/2003

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