

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S MIDWIFERY

2011

Meeting the information and learning needs of midwives

All health professionals including midwives¹ need reference and educational materials to enable them to learn, to provide appropriate advice and care, and to save lives. Members of the global network HIFA2015 (www.hifa2015.org) have identified a pervasive lack of information, knowledge gaps and unsafe care practices among midwives in low-income countries, during both training and practice.

- Textbooks and journals are scarce and may be out of date and/or irrelevant to the local context, undermining teachers' abilities to teach and students to learn [1], [2].
- There have been few assessments of clinical knowledge, but a study of midwives in a 250-bed government hospital in Uganda found a lack of basic knowledge of obstetric emergencies such as haemorrhage, obstructed labour, sepsis and eclampsia, associated with lack of standard treatment guidelines and poor quality antenatal and delivery care [3].
- A study in Cameroon found that fewer than one in six midwives were aware of all four key evidence-based obstetric interventions: antiretroviral drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, antenatal corticosteroids for prematurity, uterotonics to prevent post-partum haemorrhage, and magnesium sulphate for seizure prophylaxis [4].
- A large study of health facilities in Africa and South Asia found that 7 in 10 women were incorrectly managed during the third stage of labour, predisposing them to death from post-partum haemorrhage [5].
- Several studies have found lack of information, training and protocols to be associated with poor resuscitation skills [6]. A study in Sudan suggests that a significant number of deaths registered as stillbirths may in fact have been attributed to babies born alive but not resuscitated [7].
- Midwives lack confidence and skills to communicate health messages to women [8].

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¹This summary focuses on the information needs of midwives as defined by the International Confederation of Midwives 2005: <http://www.internationalmidwives.org/Portals/5/Documentation/ICM%20Definition%20of%20the%20Midwife%20005.pdf>. The information needs of mothers, family caregivers, community members, community health workers, and traditional birth attendants are also critically important, especially for the poorest rural populations without access to midwives and health facilities.

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