



4th Global Midwifery Symposium, Women Deliver Empowered Midwives, Transformed Communities

Midwives Call for an Enabling Environment to Transform Maternal and Newborn Health Outcomes

2nd June 2019

Background

The evidence is clear. When midwives are educated to international standards, and midwifery includes the provisions of family planning, it could avert over 80% of all maternal deaths, stillbirths and newborn deaths¹. There is also strong evidence to support that women want individualized and respectful continuity of care provided by a professionally trained and qualified midwife close to where they live².

More than 50 short-, medium-, and long-term health outcomes are improved by care provided by midwives educated to International Confederation of Midwife (ICM) standards, licensed, regulated, working in inter-professional teams and fully integrated into the health system³. These include, reduced maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, reduced stillbirths and preterm births, decreased number of unnecessary interventions, and improved psychosocial and public health outcomes.

The World Health Organization (2018) recommends that midwife-led continuity-of-care, where a known midwife or group of midwives support a woman throughout the antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal continuum, is recommended for women in settings with well- functioning midwifery programs⁴.

An enabling environment is critical to the achievement of the impact of midwife-led continuity of care, including changes in the behaviour of health care practitioners and inter-professional collaboration to enable the use of evidence-based practices, provide more 'women-centred' care, improve inter-professional respect and provide the best healthcare experience to the woman. Local professional associations and institutions play important roles in this process and an all-inclusive and participatory process should be encouraged.

There are sociocultural, professional and economic barriers, arising from gender inequality, which must be addressed to improve the environment in which midwives live and work and enable them to give women the care we know they want⁵.

¹ Renfrew et al. 2014. Midwifery and quality care: Findings from a new evidence-informed framework for maternal and newborn care. *Lancet*. 384:1129-45

² International Confederation of Midwives, World Health Organization and White Ribbon Alliance. 2016. *Midwives' Voices Midwives' Realities*. WHO, Geneva

³ Renfrew et al. 2014. Midwifery and quality care: Findings from a new evidence-informed framework for maternal and newborn care. *Lancet*. 384:1129-45

⁴ World Health Organization. 2018. WHO recommendations: intrapartum care for a positive childbirth experience. WHO, Geneva

⁵ World Health Organization. 2016. WHO Recommendation on midwife-led continuity of care during pregnancy. [Online] Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/rhl/topics/improving-health-system-performance/implementation-strategies/who-recommendation-midwife-led-continuity-care-during-pregnancy>



An enabling environment for midwives constitutes complex and interacting elements which include effective inter-professional teamwork, a strong professional identity, sufficient resources, gender equity, integration into the broader health system and government and community support.

An investment in an enabling midwifery environment is a positive value proposition and:

- Improves midwifery education and practice
- Enhances motivation and midwifery retention everywhere but particularly where they are needed most
- Improves the quality of a full range of services needed for optimal women’s health
- Empowers women (midwives and clients) and promotes person-centered care
- Improves the work life of all health workers engaged in caring for women.

Call to Action

There is clear evidence that midwives, educated to ICM standards, licensed, regulated, working in inter-professional teams and fully integrated into the health system and practicing within an enabling environment will provide high quality care that transforms maternal and newborn health outcomes. To reach this goal, we call for continued advocacy for policies that increase the midwifery workforce but with increased focus on providing an educational, regulatory and practice infrastructure that is consistent with a midwifery model of care. We call for increased support to the development of regulatory structures that ensure that midwives have a scope of practice (SOP) consistent with ICM competencies and the needs of women in their communities. We call for prioritized implementation of the action plan to strengthen quality midwifery education outlined in the recently released Framework for Action- Strengthening Quality Midwifery Education for Universal Health Coverage 2030.

Every midwife must have the opportunity to work in an enabling environment. This environment must include a) ability to practice to her or his full SOP; b) ability to make and be accountable for independent decisions within the regulated SOP; c) a functional health infrastructure with adequate human resources, equipment and supplies; d) access to timely and respectful consultation, collaboration and referral; e) safety from physical and emotional harm; and f) equitable compensation.

We call for active and respectful collaboration between midwives and their nursing and medical colleagues in pursuit of the shared goal of accessible, high quality women’s health and maternity care. This includes acknowledgement of and respect for their respective and essential roles around the pregnant and birthing woman. This acknowledgement and collaboration must occur between professional associations as well as within local and national health systems and agencies that regulate midwifery practice and on the “floor“ of the facility. Midwives must be fully engaged in all local, national, regional and global policy decisions that affect their professional practice and the needs of women and their newborns in their communities.