

International Midwives Day - 5 May 2009

On Monday the 5th of May, midwives will celebrate throughout the world, reminding everyone of the important and unique role they play in society. Midwifery is one of the oldest professions. Besides their own mothers, the first human touch felt by most people, came from a midwife.

Where women are cared for by midwives during pregnancy and birth they experience less intervention and more positive outcomes, including greater satisfaction with their birth experiences.

'Midwifery: a worldwide commitment to women and the newborn'. The world recognizes that without you [midwives], there can be no safe motherhood," This statement comes at a time when the shortage of midwives is an international crisis.

In Afghanistan, increasingly childbearing women are being looked after by unskilled birth attendants, due to the shortage of midwives

World wide, midwives remain women's first choice for a skilled attendant at birth. The midwife is the only professional with the specialized skills to care for women from conception to early motherhood. Midwives are the biggest constant in childbearing women's lives. They are recognized internationally by the World Health Organization as, "the most appropriate and cost effective type of health care provider to be assigned to the care of normal pregnancy and normal birth, including risk assessment and the recognition of complications."

Midwives change the way women experience birth for the better and birth changes the way women and their families experience life.

Today is a day for midwives to celebrate their enormous contributions to society-it is also a day to ask some serious questions in the hope that we address some of the causes of this workforce crisis. "Why is it that fewer than eight percent of childbearing women in this country can access care from a midwife they know through the pregnancy, birth and postnatal period? Why is continuity of midwifery care almost non-existent for women living in rural communities? Why are we not using midwives' skills to stem the tide of maternal mortality in our Indigenous communities when we have the evidence to support this? Why are intervention rates in childbirth now some of the highest in the world? Why are midwives often prevented from practicing to their full scope?". Midwives want to practice midwifery. If they can't do this they won't join the profession and they will increasingly leave it. Who will catch our babies then?"

It is time to act! Women deserve a first class maternity service in this country and midwives are poised perfectly to deliver on this .Childbirth is the single biggest use of hospital beds nationally and midwifery care delivers great outcomes in a cost effective manner. It is time the government realized they need to nurture the midwives that nurture the mothers that nurture the future of our country.

May 5 is the day to celebrate midwifery worldwide - to remind ourselves and everybody else of the universal importance of midwives' work and what midwives stand for.

Midwives help prevent maternal and neonatal deaths and also the disabilities that can result from pregnancy and childbirth. This is the basis and the minimum aim of good midwifery practice. In many countries the risk of death

or serious complication during pregnancy has been reduced – and this is often attributed to the expansion and professionalization of midwifery in earlier decades. Yet in all parts of the world midwives can still play a huge and significant role in enhancing the health of childbearing women and their newborns.

Midwives are women’s first choice for a skilled attendant at birth. They should also be each country’s first choice for the health professional to lead in care for childbearing women. Many other professions contribute valuable skills to assist women with particular needs, as and when a complication arises; the midwife is there throughout.

Everywhere in the world, whether populations are growing or stabilizing, whether families have one child or 10, midwifery skills are needed.

Celebrate midwives - celebrate healthy women and healthy babies -
celebrate healthy nations!