

What is a midwife?

A midwife is a person who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and legally licensed to practise midwifery. She must be able to give the necessary supervision, care and advice to women during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period, to conduct deliveries on her own responsibility and to care for the newborn and the infant. She may practise in hospitals, clinics, health units, domiciliary conditions or in any other service(1).

A midwife is a health professional who, in partnership with the woman provides care, education and support during the childbearing cycle. The midwife works with women and families during pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period facilitating early parenting. Midwives believe that childbirth is an essentially normal significant life event for women and their families(2).

Why choose midwifery care?

The World Health Organisation states that “midwives are the most appropriate primary health care providers to be assigned to the care of normal birth”(3). Midwifery is a profession based on promoting normalcy. Essentially it is an art of service, in that the midwife must recognize, respond to and cooperate with natural forces. The experienced midwife knows that there are many normal variations on the themes of pregnancy, birth and postpartum; it is her job to decipher the patterns and facilitate a healthy outcome. By giving thorough prenatal care, the midwife becomes so familiar with each client that she will quickly be alerted to any deviation from normal. The birth is the finishing touch to a carefully developed relationship involving care on physical, emotional and intellectual levels. Midwifery has often been called an art of invisibility, because it is non-interventive except to maintain balance and restore harmony (3).

Certainly the midwife is an advocate of choice. Research has shown that the more relaxed and at ease a woman is during labour, the more efficiently her body will function. A midwife’s most basic responsibility to her clients is to do her utmost to promote comfort, relaxation and peace of mind. Her hands are probably her most precious tools, as she senses, blesses and heals with her touch. She strives continually to reserve judgements and yet speak the truth. Ultimately, responsibility for the birth belongs to the parents. It is up to them to be well informed and to choose an attendant with the personal qualities and competence to suit them. And by claiming the right to experience the intimate event of birth as they choose, they open doors to unprecedented joy and fulfilment while laying the foundation for strong and sensitive parenting (4).

References

1. International Definition of a Midwife – IFGO (1991); WHO (1992)
2. WHO/FRH/MSM/96.24 Care in Normal Birth, p7.
3. “Heart and Hands” E. Davis (1987) pg.5
4. “Heart and Hands” E. Davis (1987) pg.7

Other good midwifery sites:

- www.maternitywise.org – American website with a wealth of sound evidence-based information
- www.birth.com.au - An Australian site with a smorgasbord of information on pregnancy and birth
- www.communitymidwiferywa.org.au – WA’s government funded homebirth service
- www.acmi.org.au – Professional organisational body of Australian Midwives

www.pregnancy.com.au – Australian Midwife -Jane Palmer's extensive information resource