

29th August, 2011

I wish to add my voice to the outrage felt by the Victorian Maternal & Child Health nurses (MCHN) due to the lack of consultation with the nurses and the possible devaluing of our service by the mooted plans to remove midwifery as a prerequisite for MCHN study.

Victoria boasts a universal MCH service which is well received and attended by Victorian families to support them in their parenting role. Attendance rates in South West Victoria are 99.7 per cent following discharge from hospital after delivering a baby, and continues to be above 95 per cent for the first 4 months and reaching between 85 per cent and 62.9 percent between 8 months and 3 ½ years of age of children attending the service (Victorian Maternal & Child Health Services Annual Report 2009-2010). We have post graduate qualifications which makes us best placed to screen and detect developmental delay, abnormalities including developmental dysplasia of the hip, autism spectrum disorder and post natal depression.

The possible move to remove midwifery as a prerequisite to MCHN has been attributed to a potential increase in nurses wishing to become MCHN. My midwifery qualification was not a barrier to me completing MCH, but rather a natural progression after practicing midwifery for more than ten years, I chose to support the women for the years following the birth of their children and became a MCHN.

Midwifery gave me the opportunity to share intimate experiences with women in the antenatal, intra partum and postnatal periods. The interpersonal skills I gained from these privileged positions, I believe have allowed me to develop counseling skills and the ability to support women in a meaningful way. There is great value in being able to provide continuity of care and support the women and their families throughout subsequent pregnancies. My midwifery skills are invaluable in identifying postnatal complications including uterine infections, mastitis, wound infection and to support lactation.

To suggest that a practice nurse in a GP clinic would be able to also cover our role is an insult to our skills and service. The practice nurse does not necessarily have any midwifery or child development knowledge or qualifications. A short course lasting 1-2 days was all that was offered for practice nurses to up skill them to be able to carry out four year old health checks. It is obvious that this cannot possibly equal the knowledge and experience of MCH nurses who have completed two post-graduate courses of study. I feel strongly that the midwifery qualification be maintained so we can continue to provide optimum care for young families in Victoria.

Submitted by Mary Lewis, Maternal & Child Health Nurse, Corangamite Shire & Warrnambool City Council