MIDWIFERY LED CARE, THE FIRST CHOICE FOR ALL WOMEN

BACKGROUND
Globally, there is a palpable threat to midwifery and midwives in their freedom to provide midwifery services and models of care. This is despite the acknowledgment that access to midwifery-led care is single most important factor in achieving ‘improved outcomes in maternal and newborn health’¹.

A midwifery-led model of care assumes that pregnancy, birth and the post natal period are normal life events for a mother and her baby. It is woman-centred and based on the belief that continuity of care in monitoring the physical, psychological, spiritual and social well-being of the woman and family throughout the childbearing cycle is critically important. A midwifery-led model of care provides the woman with individualised education, counselling and antenatal care; continuous attendance during labour, birth and the immediate postpartum period and ongoing support during the postnatal period. Technological interventions are minimised and women who require obstetric or other specialist attention are appropriately referred. The midwife plays a central role in co-ordinating care and linking with other health care professionals providing services for childbearing women.

There is an increasing amount of evidence that demonstrates the benefits of midwifery-led care namely; women’s satisfaction, higher perception of control, increased vaginal birth and reduced medical intervention. Women who received midwifery-led care were nearly eight times more likely to be attended at birth by a known midwife, were 21% less likely to lose their baby before 24 weeks, 19% less likely to have regional analgesia, 14% less likely to have instrumental birth, 18% less likely to have an episiotomy, and significantly more likely to have a spontaneous vaginal birth, initiate breastfeeding, and feel in control during childbirth².


²
POSITION
The midwife is the most appropriate care provider for pregnant and birthing women, mothers and their newborn and should therefore be their first contact. The evidence based benefit and absence of harm with midwife-led care supports the rationale that it is the most appropriate model of care for childbearing women. The ICM believes that midwifery-led care is cost effective and sustainable particularly in the current global economic situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Member Associations based in countries where women do not have access to midwifery-led care are encouraged to lobby their governments to develop such models, together with women and other stakeholders. Midwifery-led models provide safe, high quality care. Member associations in countries where midwifery-led models of care exist are encouraged to work with women and other stakeholders to further develop and maintain this model of care.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

Adopted at Durban International Council meeting, 2011
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