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Introductory Chapter: Empowering Midwives and Obstetric Nurses

Amita Ray

1. Revising the old

The term midwifery has been coined from two Old English words “mid” which means with and “wif” which comes from woman. Taken together the word midwife means a person who is with the woman. This person could belong to any gender provided the person is with the woman during pregnancy as well as the whole process of childbirth and thereafter: probably the most eventful and crucial part of a woman’s life.

Another word, more recently coined, is obstetrical nursing which in principles and domains follows the same as those of midwifery. Both midwifery and obstetrical nursing deal with knowledge and skills required for the nursing care of all normal and high risk pregnant woman during pregnancy, labor and after labor irrespective of the settings This discipline also includes the management of neonates and participation in family welfare programmes.

It is therefore not difficult to understand the importance of this discipline and appreciate the role of midwives in safeguarding woman’s health. “The greatest privilege of human life is to become a midwife to the Awakening of the soul in another person” is how Plato defines the profession of midwifery. Their understanding and quick action at the time of childbirth plays a pivotal role in the health of the mother and the neonate and this job of midwives has been present since prehistoric times, long before other disciplines and professions evolved [1].

The profession of midwifery has cultural significance in almost all regions of the world. “In All Cultures, the Midwife’s Place is on the Threshold of Life, Where Intense Human Emotions, Fear, Hope, Longing, Triumph, and Incredible Physical Power-Enable a New Human Being to Emerge. Her Vocation Is Unique.” – Sheila Kitzinger. Only a few men specialized in the field in earlier times making it exclusively a woman’s profession. In developing countries, there is a dearth of midwives added to this is the fact that they do not get enough support and are underpaid [2].

Women who specialize in midwifery have quite a lot of experience in the field. While the popularity of midwives reduced in the past two centuries, it has once again started rising with a lot of women preferring to give birth at home [2]. “It’s not the making of babies, but the making of mothers that midwives see as the Miracle of Birth.” – Barbara Katz Rothman.

2. Reinforcing the new

COVID has posed new challenges to the profession of midwifery. The pandemic has resulted in pregnant women and new mothers undergoing uncertainty and

chaos particularly during this important phase of their lives. Providing evidence based and appropriate health care in such times has been more difficult for obstetricians, midwives and obstetric nurses [3]. In fact it has been a challenge for health care professionals to be mentally and physically healthy themselves.

This book aims to highlight certain important aspects of midwifery. It does not claim to cover all dimensions of the profession. Over the years and as is true for other disciplines and professions newer dimensions have been added to this profession as well. This book aims to highlight some old and some new dimensions of midwifery.

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