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by JE Marshall & MD Raynor (eds), Churchill
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BOOK REVIEW:

Advancing Skills in Midwifery Practice

Edited by Jayne E. Marshall and Maureen D. Raynor

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh 2010.

In an aim to meet the continued professional development needs of qualified midwives this British book details a range of skills from forceps-assisted births to infant massage. Thirteen contributors present a particular skill over twelve of the fifteen chapters. Each of the skill-focused chapters begins with recommended prior knowledge, includes evidence-based discussion and ends with key practice points. Rationales, indications and contraindications for each skill, in addition to directions on how to perform, evaluate and document the skill are generally included. The three other chapters give context to the skill based chapters.

The introductory chapter by Jayne Marshall includes a discussion about why the title refers to 'advancing skills' rather than 'advanced practice'. The controversies about advanced midwifery practice in Britain are outlined by Marshall; while midwives are expected to move beyond their initial learning, the core tenets of midwifery remain normality, continuity and woman-centred practice. Similar controversy is apparent in Australia (Fahy, 2010; Smith, Leap & Homer, 2010). Marshall maintains that 'advanced practice' signifies a practitioner who has already achieved a higher level of development. In Britain the concepts of advanced midwifery practice (identified as professional and clinical leadership, clinical autonomy, expert practice and research) are aligned with the role of a consultant midwife. This conceptualisation of advanced midwifery practice, according to Marshall, is not necessarily about extending the role of the midwife beyond the defined sphere of normal midwifery. Yet skills that extend practice beyond that normal sphere do form part of the current practice of some midwives in Britain. In this book the chapters on ultrasonography, external cephalic version, ventouse and forceps-assisted birth illustrate those extended practices. Hence the title

refers to ‘advancing skills’ as it supports the ongoing nature of professional development which is in line with what is expected by all registered midwives regardless of their practice area.

The responsibilities of the midwife in developing skill competence are an important issue when considering advancing practice. In chapter two Marshall reviews these responsibilities using a framework of professional, legal, ethical and employer responsibility. Responsible and safe practice then runs as a theme throughout each chapter. This responsibility is evident in the way the chapters highlight that competency in each skill variously resides in: attendance at dedicated courses; periods of supervised practice; self-regulation of when and how the skill is performed; documentation and reflection on practice; and continued updating of practice. Furthermore, each chapter lists further reading that can consolidate the knowledge presented in the book.

Concepts of woman-centred care, continuity and the support of normality each in varying degrees underlie all the chapters. Chapters about midwives extending their woman-centred antenatal practice are focused on the skills of ultrasonography, external cephalic version (ECV) and moxibustion for turning babies presenting breech. The skills of moxibustion and ECV both support normality by providing practice options that can reduce the rate of unnecessary caesarean for women whose baby presents as breech. Chapters focusing on skills relating to labour and birth have the rationale that they further enable continuity of care. While these skills may involve interventions that move beyond a woman’s experience of physiological normality, practice of these skills in a woman-focused manner is encouraged in each chapter. The chapter on peripheral intravenous cannulation quite disappointingly concentrates on the legal and professional responsibilities of the midwife rather than the skill itself. In contrast, the chapters on forceps-assisted birth and breech birth present clear outlines of the procedures including a number of diagrams. The chapter on ventouse-assisted birth is enhanced by the inclusion of a woman’s response to having a midwife perform the skill and it contains personal reflections by midwife ventouse practitioners.

Five chapters cover advancing midwifery skills after birth. Chapter ten gives a comprehensive discussion on perineal repair that includes detail about repair of complex perineal trauma. The chapter on haemodynamic assessment and monitoring is an excellent overview of the key elements that should underpin all physiological examination. A chapter on physiological examination of the neonate describes in detail assessments of the heart, the eyes and the hips. Chapter thirteen outlines practical elements of infant massage and includes a very helpful table of engagement and disengagement cues indicating when the infant is

receptive to massage. The last of the skill-based chapters is on postnatal physiological examination of the mother. By following the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (2006) framework, examination to detect major morbidity and common health problems is expertly explained. Postnatal issues surrounding obesity and psychosocial needs are also briefly covered. One key omission detracting from this chapter and the book as a whole is that there is no mention of the physical examination of a woman's breasts or her initiation (or suppression) of lactation.

In the final chapter Maureen Raynor discusses the potential negative consequences of advancing skills in midwifery practice. A note of warning is given about implementing extended midwifery practices where health systems have entrenched hierarchical structures. Advancing midwifery practice, according to Raynor, requires critical thinkers, innovators and strong, effective leadership that support midwifery philosophy and a social model of care. The British focus of this book is particularly evident in this final chapter. Nonetheless, the majority of this very interesting book is applicable to Australian and international midwifery. I have no hesitation in recommending the book to any midwife because, as Raynor states, "advancing skills in midwifery practice should be the business of *every* practising midwife" (p.179).

Fahy, K. (2010). Rejoinder to Smith, R., Leap, N. & Homer, C Advanced midwifery practice or advancing midwifery practice? (Letter to the editor). *Women & Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives*, 23(3), 121. doi:10.1016/j.wombi.2010.06.002

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2006). *Routine postnatal care of women and their babies*. London: NICE.

Smith, R., Leap, N., & Homer, C. (2010). Advanced midwifery practice or advancing midwifery practice? *Women & Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives*, 23(3), 117-120. doi:10.1016/j.wombi.2009.11.002