Position Statement

Midwifery Led Care, the First Choice for All Women

Background

The medicalisation of birth has impacted on the midwifery profession and midwifery models of care all over the world. Increasingly, pregnancy and birth are not seen as normal physiological processes led by midwives, but as high risk events in women’s lives that require medical intervention by highly specialised obstetricians. Evidence demonstrates however, that in order to improve maternal and neonatal health and to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, midwifery led care is crucial.

A midwife-led model of care means that the midwife is the lead health-care professional, responsible for the planning, organisation and delivery of care given to a woman from the initial booking of antenatal visits through to care during the postnatal period. The midwife-led model of care is woman-centred and based on the premise that pregnancy and childbirth are normal life events.

This model of care provides the woman with education, counselling and antenatal care adapted to her specific needs; continuous care during labour, birth and the immediate postpartum period and ongoing support during the postnatal period. It promotes birth as a normal process and advocates for a minimum of interventions. In case of complications, women are appropriately referred.

Compared to other models of care, midwife-led care has a significant number of benefits. Women are less likely to have an epidural, an episiotomy, or instrumental birth. Women’s’ chances of a spontaneous vaginal birth are increased and there is no difference in the rate of caesarean sections. Women are less likely to experience preterm birth, and they are also at a lower risk of their babies dying before 24 weeks gestation. In addition, women who receive midwife-led care are nearly eight times more likely to be attended at birth by a known midwife. There are no adverse effects compared to other models of care.

Position
ICM believes that midwifery led care is the most appropriate model of care for childbearing women. It provides safe and high quality care and is associated with more efficient use of resources and improves outcomes.

Recommendations
Member Associations based in countries where women do not have access to midwife-led care are encouraged to advocate for the development of such models in their countries, together with women and other stakeholders. Member associations in countries where midwifery-led models of care do exist are encouraged to work with women and other stakeholders to further develop and maintain this model of care.

Related ICM Documentation

Other Relevant Documents
UN. 2016. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Adopted at Durban International Council meeting, 2011
Revised at Toronto International Council meeting, 2017

Due for review, 2023