

Midwives ‘with woman’ the power of professional identity

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ABSTRACT

Background

Being ‘with woman’ is a central construct of the profession of midwifery. Despite its prevalence in professional vernacular, very little evidence exists about the phenomenon of being ‘with woman’.

Aim

The purpose of this study was to explore midwives’ perceptions of being ‘with woman’ in the context of providing care to women during labour and birth.

Methods

A descriptive phenomenological approach was used to conduct in-depth one to one interviews with 31 midwives working in a variety of maternity settings within Western Australia. Midwives worked in models where labour and birth care was provided by unknown midwives, in standard public models; known midwives, in continuity models; and unknown midwives but known obstetricians in the private obstetric model.

Results

Three themes were revealed 1) Essential to professional identity; 2) Partnership with women; and 3) Woman Centred Practice. Midwives offered descriptions of the importance of being ‘with woman’ to the identification of applied midwifery practice. Developing a connection with the woman and providing woman-centred care emphasised.

Recommendations/Conclusion

For the first time, evidence of how midwives understand and perceive the phenomenon of being ‘with woman’ which has theoretical and practical utility has been provided. Novel findings from this innovative study confirm that midwives conceptualise the phenomenon of being ‘with woman’ as essential to the identity and practice of the profession. Previously identified ‘good midwifery practices’ were revealed as practical manifestations of the phenomenon. This new knowledge provides evidence to understand the characteristics of care underpinned by philosophy, which is useful for the development of educational curricula as well as supporting graduate and professional midwives. The findings emphasise the urgency to develop language around this significant philosophical construct which permeates midwifery practice, enhances professional agency and supports the continued emphasis of being ‘with woman’ with new understanding of its applied practices in a variety of care models.