

A Midwifery Perspective on the Amsterdam Declaration

- Migrant Friendly Hospitals

So why is mother and child health so important?

Mother and child health is a global issue. It is one which is fundamental to all our futures.

- Regarding the health of children.

UNICEF states that the survival, protection and development of children are universal issues, which are essential to human progress. Infant mortality and morbidity rates for immigrant populations are disproportionately high e.g. In the UK, the perinatal mortality rate for non white babies is twice that of white babies.

- And when it comes to Mothers;

In the UK, The Confidential Enquiry into maternal health has just published its 6th report – November 2004 – Why Mothers Die. This examines all maternal deaths directly or indirectly related to pregnancy and for up to a year after the birth.

Risk factors for maternal deaths are identified; specifically mentioned are those who are socially disadvantaged, those from poor communities and those from minority ethnic groups. Black African women, especially asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees have death rates seven times higher than the indigenous population and were noted to have major problems when accessing health care.

A maternal death is not just a statistic, the child loses its mother and the impact is huge

Within an increasingly ethnically diverse Europe there are constantly new challenges facing Health Practitioners to provide

appropriate mother and child health services for women and their families.

Some migrant communities in Europe are new and may be transient and some are much more stable and long established.

Whatever the community there are challenges in providing appropriate and effective services.

The key issues are;

- Access

Access to acceptable equitable services, which meet the needs of women and their families.

- Communication

This includes language, the need for reliable interpreting and also unspoken communication. There are also issues of literacy.

It must be noted that even with good translation there can be problems as the health concepts put forward may not even exist in another culture.

- Cultural and Religious Sensitivities

Which may cause misunderstanding and barriers to effective use of services. This highlights the need for cultural mediators and health advocacy.

- Resources and Health Economics

Which probably need no further explanation in today's climate.

How can health care providers / midwives respond to these challenges?

To work towards equitable health care for all women means the midwife needs not only expert clinical skills but must also have imagination, creativity and above all an open mind.

It is essential to establish the needs of the community. A needs assessment is required and how this is done will vary according to the population in question, but it must be done.

It is important to become knowledgeable about the community and to work within the community with its representatives, involving them in service planning.

Staff must also be educated and actively engaged. Crucially this means looking at attitudes and trying to change those attitudes where necessary, working towards culturally competent staff.

Irrespective of language barriers women can read unspoken communication. They know when they are being made to feel

welcome, when they are being patronised or when they are being treated with respect and dignity.

The benefits of good service provision to both the population and the service must be considered; this will help to gain management support and may also help with resources and finance.

Providing equitable health care takes time, commitment and investment within an organisation, but the long-term benefits to the service and to the population should be considered worth that investment.