

Is there a place for Global Standards for Midwifery Education in Europe?

Ans Luyben^{1,2}, Ruth Forster Fink²

ABSTRACT

World- wide, midwifery education aims to equip midwives with the essential competencies needed to be able to provide high quality, evidence based health care services for women and childbearing families. Having global standards for midwifery education available to all countries and regions will help to set benchmarks for the preparation of a fully qualified midwife based on global norms and enhances international mobility. Whereas content of midwifery education and practice are well- defined in EU directive 2005/36/EG, the Standards provide a complementary framework that supports midwifery programmes in Europe in their autonomy, so that they will be able to deliver this content.

RESUMO

O programa da formação das parteiras visa desenvolver competências básicas nestes profissionais de forma a implementarem cuidados seguros e de qualidade na área de saúde materna e obstétrica. A existência de padrões que orientem a sua formação nos diferentes países e regiões permitem uma preparação mais qualificada e de forma a possibilitar maior mobilidade internacional. Sabendo que existe a Directiva UE 2005/36/EG que define o programa de formação das parteiras na Europa é necessário e vantajoso criar standards que orientem o quadro de referencia da formação destes profissionais capacitando-os para a autonomia.

World-wide, midwifery education aims to equip midwives with the essential competencies needed to be able to provide high quality, evidence based health care services for women and childbearing families. In 2008, the International Confederation Midwives (ICM) decided to develop global standards for midwifery education, in order to respond to requests from a variety of stakeholders, who are working together to strengthen and scale up the midwifery workforce to meet, in part, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the same time, the Education Standing Committee (ICM), initially initiated in 2005, was re-established with new ex-

perts. This Committee includes 26 members in 7 sections of expertise in midwifery education (e.g. Practical placements, Competencies and standards) and three Co- Chairs covering the ICM regions, Prof. Dr. Mary Barger (Americas/ Africa), Prof. Dr. Susan McDonald (Asia/ Pacific) and Prof. Dr. Ans Luyben (Europe). These midwifery educators communicate through the Education Network (midwifery-reprohealtheducation@jiscmail.ac.uk). With 16 members coming from different European countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Spain and Great Britain, this region is well- represented. Current activities involved developing the WHO Multidisciplinary Patient Safety Curriculum, preparation of workshops for the ICM Conference in Durban 2011 and, of course, developing Global Standards for Midwifery Education.

The development of the Global Standards for Midwifery Education builds up upon the work on the Essential Competencies for basic midwifery practice (ICM) that are currently under revision. In regard to the WHO Global Standards for the initial education for Nursing and Midwifery, the Standards were intended to provide more detailed guidance on how to structure and support the initial education of qualified midwives. Therefore, in January 2009, Dr. Joyce Thompson (USA) and Prof. Angela Sawyer (Liberia) were appointed as Co- Chairs of a Task Force to carry out this work. A proposal for developing the education standards was designed and approved in March 2009. Following on, a Task Force of 11 experts in midwifery education, representing all ICM regions and the three official languages- English, French and Spanish as well as WHO and the ICM Board and ESC, agreed to work on the Task Force. An Expert Midwifery Resource Group was established and other key stakeholders, such as obstetricians (FIGO) and nurses (ICN) were selected to advise the Task Force.

Preparation for drafting a set of Standards for Midwifery Education included perusing the literature on midwifery

¹ Co- Chair Education Standing Committee ICM (Europe)

² Research & Development/ Consultancy Midwifery, Department of Health, Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, Berne, Switzerland

education, ICM core documents and position statements, reviewing existing standards for health professional education and soliciting information from a variety of resources, such as the Task Force members. Throughout this process, it was agreed that the Standards would be the minimum expected for a quality midwifery programme, with an emphasis on competency-based education rather than academic degrees. Next to this, the working definition of “standard” was agreed to be: “A norm/ uniform reference point that describes a required level of achievement for quality midwifery education”. The framework for designing the standards included six sections; 1. Organisation and administration, 2. Midwifery faculty, 3. Student body, 4. Curriculum, 5. Resources, facilities and services, and 6. Assessment strategies. The Task Force also developed a companion set of Guidelines to support implementation of these Standards meant to address two questions: 1. How can one implement each standard? and 2. How does one determine whether the standard has been met (what is the evidence needed)?

In order to gain global consensus on the Midwifery Education Standards, it was decided that a modified Delphi survey process, which was electronically conducted, was the most appropriate approach. The modified Delphi tool used in the ICM Education survey expanded the group of informants in each successive round. Midwifery educators were involved in the early development stages. Other stakeholders, such as nurses, obstetricians, WHO, SIDA, were included at later stages, when the standards had been collated in a more precise and more coherent fashion, so that comments could be focused on practical, rather than theoretical matters. One internal round and two external rounds were conducted, in which a consensus level of 0.80 was applied. The results of each round

were discussed with the members of the Task Force. Key details of the Standards involve for example midwifery leadership of education programme, entry level of students, qualification of teachers and mentors in school and practice, minimum length of education programme, philosophy of midwifery practice and teaching and resources and facilities. Currently, the final document of the Global Standards, including a preface, a glossary and accompanying guidelines, has been presented to the ICM Board. During the ICM Conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2011, workshops will provide opportunities to discuss the implementation of these Standards.

Having Global Standards for Midwifery Education available to all countries and regions will help to set benchmarks for the preparation of a fully qualified midwife based on global norms and particularly strengthen midwifery in low and medium resource countries. What does this mean for midwifery in Europe however? Although, according to EU directive 2005/36/EU, content of midwifery education and practice are well-defined, the Standards will provide a complementary framework that supports programmes of midwifery education in Europe in their autonomy, so that they will be able to deliver this content, and enhance international mobility of midwives and exchange of students and teachers between schools. They constitute an ideal framework for developing, improving, structuring as well as accrediting programmes for midwifery education. The Standards present an useful tool in particular for countries aiming to improve the quality of midwifery education, and can be used by a school for designing a development plan to be implemented over several years (for example 5 to 10 years). Last but not least, the Standards will thus support promotion of midwifery education as means to improve the health of childbearing women and their families.