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MIDWIFERY EDUCATION

Jude Strid
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DEGREE, DIPLOMA OR JUST MIDWIFERY REGISTRATION?

The debate over whether midwifery programmes should provide a degree or a diploma in addition to registration is a very new one. It has been prompted by a number of factors. Some of these include:

- Nursing is moving to degree courses
- Other countries now offer degree courses
- Nursing (and therefore it is assumed midwifery as well) needs a status elevation in both education and career aspects
- There is now provision for Polytechnics to offer degree courses

As planning proceeds to establish direct entry midwifery programmes, some consider it a good opportunity to bring midwifery in at a degree level for this commencing stage. This has placed pressure on the NZ College of Midwives as the professional body, to make a decision before the DEM curriculums are submitted by 1st June 1991.

However there is also a need for consumers to participate in the debate and to think about the implications for women.

We need to look at the reasons prompting the debate. Are they good reasons on which to make a decision to support a degree and are they appropriate reasons for women in Aotearoa - whether they be midwives, potential midwives or birthing women?

There are a number of questions yet to be answered. For example, what actually is the difference between a degree and diploma course? How would a degree enhance the course and the outcome? Views vary enormously in response to these questions.

Although it has become important for some midwives to develop midwifery as a career; essentially it is not just an academic profession or a career in this sense. It is traditionally a vocation, a calling, something women are drawn (in some cases compelled) towards. It also has a strong service aspect to it but good practice is dependent on a good education.

To facilitate discussion on this amongst women health consumers it may be helpful to consider the identified pros and cons:

Possible Advantages of a Degree

- Career opportunities, recognition and status

- It takes ages now to obtain a post grad. degree when t training is worthy of a degree

- why should nurses get degrees and midwives only diploma (this only applies if midwives have to have one or the

Possible Disadvantages of a Degree

- There is likely to be considerable delay in proces degree DEM course through the NZ Qualifications Aut

- It is not a good idea to combine programmes of an experimental nature. A direct entry midwifery degree be combining 3 experimental programmes:
  (i) DEM is at an experimental stage in Aotearoa
  (ii) A degree in midwifery would be experimental
  (iii) Polytechnics offering degrees is experimental

- Uncertainty of what the consumer perception of a mi would be, and inverted intellectual snobbery as well

- Concern that there may be a significant academic inbalanc midwifery (for example as in North America)

- It may inhibit access for some women

- It may be even more alienating to maori and pacific isla women

Ultimately, we need to support women centred programmes tha are appropriate, accessible, of good quality and in keeping with both the tangata whenua and consumer partnerships; to prepare women for competent independent midwifery practice.

Do we even need a degree or diploma? The crucial considerations are for programmes to be:

(i) philosophically acceptable
(ii) provide adequate preparation for safe practice
(iii) meet the needs of childbearing women
(iv) be valued appropriately
(v) facilitate worthwhile employment opportunities

We can actually meet these needs with just Midwifery Registration - that is awarded its proper value. Achieving midwifery registration would entitle the midwife to credits as with other courses and so long as the programme is valued appropriately the issue of diploma or degree becomes irrelevant.