

Profession: midwifery (UK)

Roles and responsibilities of a midwife

A midwife's role in the UK is governed by Statute. The governing body for midwifery in the UK is the Nursing and Midwifery Council (see nmc.org.uk).

It is a real privilege to work with women and their families throughout pregnancy, during childbirth and in the early days of becoming new parents. Midwives in the UK work in a variety of settings including a woman's home, health centres, stand alone midwifery birth centres and hospital based maternity units. Midwives in the UK are employed by the NHS and some practice independently.

A midwife is an autonomous practitioner and is responsible for the care of women throughout a normal pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. A midwife's key role is to promote health and normality which is a vision of midwifery in 2020 (Midwifery 2020 Programme, 2010).

A midwife is the lead professional in for the majority of births. A midwife must base her practice on sound evidence and is accountable for her practice (NMC, 2004 Rule 6). A midwife must also recognise problems and refer to an appropriate health care professional when necessary to assist in the care (NMC. 2004 Rule 6).

Modern Perspectives

Midwifery 2020 published in 2010 provides a clear vision of the role of the midwife for the future. It recognises the midwife as the lead professional for low risk women as well as having a role in the care of women with complex conditions in childbirth. The midwife's role in public health in future is likely to be strengthened. Midwifery (2020:5) recognises the emphasis on quality for a midwife's role in the following terms: 'person centredness, safety, effectiveness, efficiency, equity and timeliness'.

This recognises the woman's need for choice, continuity and to develop a trusting relationship with a small team of midwives for her care.

Therefore, midwives are still recognised as the experts on normal midwifery care but in today's society there is an increasing need for them to be involved in multi professional/agency working.

Life Long Journey

Midwifery practice is constantly changing and with need to deliver evidence based care midwives must ensure that they engage in ongoing education and training (NMC, 2004).

A midwife can further develop their expertise to take on new roles such as in research, education, management. Also a number of specialist roles are developing for example diabetes specialist midwife, Sure Start Midwives, Bereavement Support Midwives, midwives working with vulnerable women (asylum seekers, victims of domestic abuse, teenagers) to name but a few.

References

Midwifery 2020 Programme (2010) *Midwifery 2020 Delivering expectations* September London, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)(2004) *Midwives rules and standards*, London, NMC.