

Profession: Midwifery

Role and Responsibilities of a Midwife

A midwife's role is governed by statute, but it is also a real privilege to work with women and their families throughout pregnancy, childbirth and the early days of new parenting. Midwives work in a variety of settings including homes, Health Centres, Birthing Units and traditional hospital based maternity units.

They are autonomous practitioners responsible for the care of women throughout normal pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period promoting health and normality. They are the lead professional in attendance at approximately 70% of births and responsible for provision of evidence based information, skilled care and support to women and their babies, and are accountable for their actions. Midwives must also recognise problems necessitating referral and support from other professional groups or agencies as the woman and her family are at the centre of care provision, therefore the midwife must work collaboratively with other health and social care providers to ensure individual needs are met.

Modern Perspectives

The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services has recently been published (DoH 2004) which highlights the need for care which meets individual needs and particularly focuses on reaching those from disadvantaged groups. It reinforces the need for women to have choice and control in relation to their care and recognises the need to promote normality. Recommendations include the introduction of managed Maternity and Neonatal Care Networks to promote linked groups of professionals and organisations working together in a co-ordinated manner to provide high quality, clinically effective care.

Midwives continue to be recognised as the experts to provide normal maternity care provision but in today's society there is increasing need for them to be involved in multi-professional/agency working.

Life Long Journey

The context of Maternity care is constantly changing and the evidence base for midwifery practice is ever increasing therefore a fundamental aspect of practice is the need for ongoing education and training (NMC 2004). This does mean however that broader career opportunities for qualified midwives now exist, as in addition to careers in midwifery education, management or research, there are increasing opportunities to specialise in an aspect of midwifery care or become a consultant midwife. Specialities include such posts as Lactation Advisors, Antenatal Screening Co-ordinators, Bereavement Support Midwives or Sure Start Midwives working with Teenage mothers, to name but a few.

Department of Health (DoH) (2004) *National Service framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services – Maternity Services* DoH
Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2004) *Midwives Rules and Standards* NMC