

# Midwifery in Developing Countries

O.A. Ojo and Enang Bassey Briggs, *A Textbook for Midwives in the Tropics*, Edward Arnold, London, 1982, pp. 468

The appearance of a new textbook on midwifery for the tropics is a very significant milestone for the training of midwives in the developing countries of Africa. The authors of the book must be commended for both their ingenuity and efforts in bringing out a book that is intended among other things to alert the students of midwifery and nurse educators to the specific health problems of the maternal and child health population in the tropics as well as drawing their attention to some important aspects of the management of these health problems.

For quite a long time we in this region have depended a lot on the traditional midwifery textbooks written by writers like Margaret Myles, Mary Mayes etc. In the last two decades several books on neo-natal care and neo-natal medicine in developing countries have been published and these books have somewhat broadened the horizons of midwives' understanding of their own discipline. But of necessity such books, because of their very specialised character could only serve as reference material rather than prescribed text for midwifery programmes. It is therefore refreshing to read a book that aims at surveying the entire spectrum of midwifery for students in the tropics.

Looking at the Foreword and the Introduction sections of the book one makes the following assumptions about the aims of the book:

- i. that the textbook is written for use by students who will have had instruction at the basic registered nursing level and are therefore professional nurses in the tropics or subtropics.
- ii. that the midwifery student is being prepared to function as an effective midwife and as a member of the large health team structure.
- iii. that the textbook is intended to assist the student midwife to see midwifery practice in the context of the socio-economic, the geographical and the cultural factors prevailing in the developing countries, and be able to develop appropriate intellectual responses to the situation.
- iv. that the textbook intends to stimulate a public-health oriented approach to the practice of midwifery.
- v. that the textbook in addition to providing guidelines basic to the practice of midwifery also exposes the students to recent advances in midwifery management.

On reviewing the book some strengths as well as weaknesses have been identified:

The book is simple and concise and thus makes good reading. Both the language and style are clear. Diagrams are clear and appropriately located in relation to the material they are intended to amplify. However the diagram designed to illustrate "foetal circulation" (page 83) does not quite highlight certain structures which a diagram of the foetal circulation should vividly illustrate. An example of an effective diagram is on page 50, figures 5.3a & b.

The sections are clearly written and kept reasonably short, a good feature for a clinical textbook. The approach is systematic. A good bit of information on recent advances in midwifery practice management in the form of peri-natal maternal and foetal disorders, their early detection, diagnosis and management have been included. This should be useful in that the student midwife is made aware of the impact of immunological advances and new monitoring devices on midwifery management and subsequently child health. For us in Botswana it reveals the progress that has been made and is being made by practitioners in Ibadan and perhaps other African countries in the area of early detection, diagnosis and management of intra-uterine foetal problems. A decade ago one would have expected to find such facilities in the developed countries only.

The management of normal and abnormal pregnancies and labours, the normal newborn, the low birth weight and premature newborn etc., have been clearly handled and specific intervention strategies are being suggested.

The book does not treat the subject of midwifery in a comprehensive health sense as such. Each section is presented and treated as a distinct and separate part of the whole and the inter-relationships among, and between the parts are not brought out at all. The meaningfulness of the subject of midwifery has been sacrificed for the strict compartmentalisation of chapters. Also, the application of the aspects of prevention of complications promotion and restoration of health in midwifery practice is not evident throughout the book. The chapters and sections are not quite linked up to give continuity to the subject matter.

The Introduction - Section I, addresses in a very general sense, some medical and social problems that make midwifery practice in Africa different in some way from the practice of midwifery in the more developed countries. This is immediately followed by the description of the bony pelvis in Section 2. This section gives straightforward structural and regional anatomy information, and methods for determining pelvic adequacy and cephalo-pelvic disproportion. There is no prior reference to the importance of the pelvic cavity in child bearing, nor is there any prior reference to complications or problems that may result from cephalo-pelvic disproportion. This in my view does not enable the student to appreciate the authors' rationale for starting a midwifery book with the bony pelvis.

The authors give specific prescriptions for assessing the pelvis and also for determining the extent of cephalo-pelvic disproportions but there is no preamble that assists the student to see this in its proper perspective. The section on the foetal skull which gives details of the skull and the different diameters are discussed but the significance of the foetal skull diameters to the pelvic measurements is not even mentioned. There are several illustrations of this kind of fragmentation and discontinuities in the book, and this feature does not promote integration of learnt material in the student.

The psychological and socio-cultural factors that are likely to affect the midwifery patient have not been given the emphasis they deserve. Very little mention or none is made of the importance of the patients' family life style, the cultural beliefs and values of the family and how information about these factors is important in assessing the patient as a total person. Several factors that are likely to militate against the regular attendance of the ante-natal care clinics by the patients such as distance, fatigue, domestic chores, young children to be looked after, healthworkers' attitudes, and family beliefs should be highlighted so that the student midwife learns to recognise the need to plan for a system that would ease the patients' problems and encourage the patients to seek medical assistance.

Having mentioned in the introductory chapter that malaria, hookworm infestation, nutritional anaemia and sickle-cell anaemia were rife in the tropics one would expect that history-taking, and health assessment would emphasize ways of identifying the presence of the above conditions. This emphasis does not quite come out in the book. History taking, health assessment, physical examination and recording, do not quite get the emphasis they deserve throughout the book. It should be borne in mind that a good number of pregnant mothers in the developing countries never get to see a doctor during pregnancy, delivery and puerperium. So the nurse midwife must develop a high level of competence in the above skills. Also, the nurse should be able to interpret certain laboratory test findings so that appropriate referral can be made. A textbook written for the practice of midwifery in the tropics should pay particular attention to such issues.

The book is completely devoid of any form of suggested readings or reference materials for students to consult. The book itself is written for the average student. The above average student who is capable of asking questions and critically analysing the content of the book certainly will not find this textbook intellectually challenging.

The book aims at preparing a midwife that will function in the tropics; and in the introduction some reference is made to the peculiarities of midwifery in developing Africa. There are however no real situations cited in the line of research reports, case studies or observation studies conducted in Africa or in Nigeria. In this respect I found the book very limiting both for the teacher and the student. This is indeed a weakness throughout the book.

Some statistics that would demonstrate the frequency with which some of the obstetric and medical problems referred to occur would do a lot to help the student and the teacher to recognise or appreciate the 'uniqueness' of the book and its relevance to the clinical setting in Africa. In fact without statistical evidence of occurrence of obstetric problems in Africa, there is no basis for writing the book. The book certainly does not enrich the students' understanding of the special emergency procedures that the midwife can carry out when the situation demands emergency action. The impression one gets from reading the book is that the writers have in mind a setting where the midwife will always be within easy reach of a doctor and sophisticated equipment. Unfortunately such situations are rare in most of the developing countries within the tropics, especially in Africa.

The section on Fertility regulation is written clearly and is very informative. The aspect of client counselling and education in fertility regulation is a very important one. Yet one observes that the writers have completely omitted this major component of fertility regulation. At the present time when health workers claim that clients are being fully involved in the decisions concerning their healthcare, one cannot help but notice the failure of the authors to put across to their students, the concept of counselling and education in fertility regulation. The broader principles and process of health education in midwifery have not been addressed fully in this textbook. Here and there one finds a catalogue of the health talks that the students should give and how these should be given. Professional nursing students should be encouraged or assisted to grasp the broad principles of the purpose and process of health education rather than merely being given a list of things to do. These students are going to find themselves in various midwifery situations where they will be required to carry out patient teaching, family and community education. Thus a good grasp of the principles underlying health education should help midwifery students to deal with any eventualities in health education situations.

The section on Public Health which deals with immunisation, environmental sanitation, basic health services, vital statistics and fertility regulation should be useful for student midwives; but these chapters are tucked in at the end of the book as additional chapters and the link between them and the rest of the material in the book is not effectively brought out and sustained throughout the book. This gives the book a kind of patchwork character. The concept of the team in healthcare has not been handled well. For a book that has just been reprinted one would have expected some treatment of the concept of Primary Health Care approach as applied to midwifery practice.

It may be argued that a textbook is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is also a fact that a textbook does not necessarily replace the teacher and therefore cannot be everything to the student. These and similar allowances notwithstanding, it is still not unfair to state that these authors have raised the expectations of midwifery teachers and students in Africa and elsewhere, and it is accordingly not too much to expect that their textbook should at least do for African and other Third World countries what Margaret Myles' well-known Textbook for Midwives did so splendidly for Britain but still could not quite accomplish for the developing countries.

1. Myles, Margaret, Textbook for Midwives: with modern Concepts of Obstetrics and Neo-natal Care, Churchill Living, Edinburgh, 1981; Rosemary E. Bailey, Mayes Midwifery: A textbook for Midwives: London, The English Book Society and Baillare Tindald Eighth Edition 1976

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