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Nutrition and pregnancy - what role for the midwife?

Abstract

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Nutrition and pregnancy – key issues for midwives

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Good nutrition and appropriate weight gain during pregnancy are known to be associated with a successful pregnancy and the ongoing health of mother and baby¹. Rarely is good nutrition a focus of antenatal care and even weight gain expectations have become downplayed through concerns about 'regulating' mothers and causing unnecessary concern². There is a trend for women to be overweight or obese when they become pregnant, which is associated with an increased incidence of gestational diabetes and other problems³, and for mothers to have poor knowledge of their nutritional requirements during pregnancy and lactation⁴. Studies have shown that pregnant women are most receptive to educational messages about behaviour change⁵. However, most midwives are not well educated about nutrition for pregnancy or about the most effective strategies to assist pregnant women with their diet and weight^{6,7,8}.

This symposium will present findings from recent research that identifies gaps in pregnancy care and outlines implications for midwifery education and practice. The symposium will profile recent research in nutrition and weight management during pregnancy and identify key strategies for midwives to use in addressing the issue. The combined results of these studies clearly identifies a potential gap in midwifery education and practice. The symposium will draw on the experiences of the panel and the participants to explore research and education strategies to address this gap.

The presenters are an international team of midwives and public health professionals from Australia and Denmark who have particular expertise in research focussed on nutrition and weight management in pregnancy:

Jamila Arrish, BSc, MPH, MSc (Nutr&Diet), PhD candidate, Public Health, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Khlood Bookari, BSc, MSc (Nutr & Diet), PhD candidate, Public Health, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Deborah Davis, RM, BN, MNStudies, PhD, Professor of Midwifery, University of Canberra, Australia.

Maralyn Foureur, RM, BA, GradDipClinEpidem, PhD, Professor of Midwifery, University of Technology, Australia.

Ellen Aagaard Nahr, RM, MHSc, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Public Health, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Maira Williamson: RN, RM, CertMcN, BN, M HAdmin, GCHEd, PhD, Associate Professor of Midwifery, Central Queensland University, Australia; Honorary Senior Fellow, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Heather Yeatman, BSc, DipEd, GDipND, MPH, DPH, Associate Professor Public Health, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Symposium Program:

1. Introduction: (5 minutes)

Heather Yeatman / Moira Williamson

2. Nutrition during pregnancy – exploring women's knowledge and models of nutrition communication. (15 minutes)

This section will present findings from a study investigating women's knowledge about recommended safe and healthy eating practices during pregnancy, as well as their readiness for dietary change. The study explored pregnant women's perceptions about the importance of pregnancy-specific nutrition information and their specific needs for information and models of nutrition communication during pregnancy. The presentation will also discuss the barriers and / or factors that may prevent pregnant women from applying their knowledge to daily food practices. Views of health professional to the study findings, and their approaches to meet the expressed needs of pregnant women will also be presented.

Presenter: Khlood Bookari (Yeatman, Williamson)

3. Guidelines for gestation weight gain: What is the evidence? (15 minutes)

This section will focus on the Institute of Medicines (IOM) Guidelines from 2009, which is implemented in antenatal care in many countries all over the world. Data from the Danish National Birth Cohort, which was an important part of the evidence regarding outcomes in the mother and child, will be presented. Challenges facing midwives when trying to facilitate women's attempts to meet the guidelines will also be discussed.

Presenter: Associate Professor Ellen Aagaard Nahr

4. Nutrition and pregnancy – what role for the midwife? (15 minutes)

This section will present findings from a study that explored the role of Australian midwives in nutrition education during pregnancy and their perceptions of this role. A review of the nutrition content of curricula for midwifery schools around Australia was also undertaken. This presentation will provide the results for the above two studies. Strategies for assisting midwives to integrate nutrition education into their practice will be discussed.

Presenter: Jamila Arrish (Yeatman, Williamson)

5. Weight and pregnancy – encouraging healthy weight gain; reducing the risks of being overweight (15 minutes)

This section presents a recent study undertaken in Australia using a model of group antenatal care, with an emphasis on healthy eating and activity in pregnancy, for women who were classified as overweight and obese. Details of the program content and the collaborative, multidisciplinary method of program development and delivery as well as evidence of the acceptability of the program to women and midwives are included in the presentation.

Presenters: Professor Deb Davis; Professor Maralyn Foureur

6. Summary & discussion – key issues for midwives and midwifery practice (20 minutes)

Panel discussion

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