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Overgaard, Charlotte

Publication date:
2016

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):

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Intrapartum care for women at low obstetric risk

Charlotte Overgaard
Midwife, MSc in Health Science, PhD
Associate Professor in Maternal Health
Research Group for Public Health & Epidemiology

Bozen, 24 February 2016
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Pregnancy & childbirth in Denmark (5 mill people)

- **ALL** maternity services are **free** (tax paid)
- >99% of all women choose to follow the national antenatal program:
  - All women have **shared care** during pregnancy by a **midwife** (primary carer) and a **general practitioner**
  - High risk women have additional care by an obstetrician or specialist midwife

2015: 57,000 births.
- 97,5% in obstetric unit
- 0,5-1% freestanding midwifery units (3 units in DK – 55 in UK)
- 2% home birth (small but steady increase)
- Midwives attend all births - and care autonomously for low risk births regardless of place of birth

- Low perinatal mortality (<6/1000), low maternal mortality <10/100,000
- **Relatively** low intervention rates (all births): 20% caesarean section
Midwifery in Denmark

- >300 years of authorisation for autonomous care for low risk women during pregnancy/birth/post partum

- Trained in a 3.5 year direct-entrance Bsc. program (Danish midwives are not nurses)

- No routine use of cardiotocografi (CTG) during birth
- No obstetrician or paediatrician present at/after birth (unless called because of complications)

- Midwives are authorised to independently:
  - give medication to stop post partum bleeding
  - give pain relief for and perform suturing of 1 + 2 degree perineal tears
  - initiate resuscitation / emergency treatment of mother and child
Midwifery services

(in DK but also other Nordic countries, the UK ect.)

- **In DK:** Obstetric units must have a **separate budget** for midwifery services (administrated by a chief midwife) to be spend on:
  - Pregnancy care and post partum care (mostly out-of-hospital)
  - 24h/day home birth service (hospitals obligated by law)
  - Intrapartum care for both high-risk and low-risk women

Midwives are free to set up a private practice but are normally employed by a hospital with an obstetric unit.

- **Midwifery services in hospital may also include:**
  - Screening for fetal malformations (scans by midwife-sonographs)
  - Specialist services (consultant midwife, specialist care for particular groups)
  - Post partum care (some hospitals have a midwifery-led post natal ward)
  - Local authorisation to perform e.g. instrumental delivery
The key concept

“Every woman needs a midwife, and some women need a doctor too” (Sandall 2013)
Midwifery-led care – what is it?

Care where:

- a midwife is the lead professional in the planning, organization, and delivery of care throughout pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period

Midwife finishing her administrative tasks after a birth at the obstetric unit, Aalborg University Hospital (right)
A key element in midwifery-led care is continuity, which has different forms:

1) A stated staff commitment to a shared philosophy of care

2) Continuous carer responsibility
   - Same midwife all though birth
     (BUT she may care for two or more women at the same time)

3) Continuous midwifery support during labour (Cochrane review)
   - A midwife is present with the woman all through birth
     – one to one care (but maybe not the same midwife)

4) Continuity/“knownness” of carer = caseload midwifery
   - Care throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period is provided by same or a small group of 2-3 midwives
How do midwifery-led continuity models of care compare to medically-led or shared care?

Women in midwifery-led continuity models compared to hospital-led care are:

- Less likely to experience:
  - overall fetal/neonatal death
  - preterm birth
  - regional analgesia, episiotomy, and instrumental birth

- More likely to
  - experience spontaneous vaginal birth
  - feel in control during childbirth
  - initiate breastfeeding

Significant **benefits** for mothers and babies **without** showing any **adverse effects**

Furthermore, a **cost-saving effect** has been seen (may depend on health care system).

Increased use of midwifery services are recommended by WHO (see also THE LANCET series on Midwifery from 2014)

A substantial body of high-level evidence show that (also in high-income countries):

- midwives in continuity-of-care models contribute to high-quality and safe care
- improvement of maternal and newborn health may be possible through midwifery

One important thing is getting the balance right in the use of interventions

- Midwives may simply be more aware of the old slogan:
Global concerns in birth care

- **Services close** due to specialisation, centralisation and cut downs
  - Women have to travel far in labour (sometimes >100 km)
    - To early admission to hospital may trigger a cascade of interventions
  - Local / rural communities loose services

- Obstetric units are getting increasingly **large** (3-8000 births) and **busy**
  - Complaints over work overload; low job satisfaction among midwives
  - Use of interventions are increasing (in DK – focus on overuse of augmentation of labour)
  - **Lack of continuity** (staff is moved around to fill gaps)
    - Women often see different midwives during pregnancy
    - Women may be attended by several different midwives (and doctors) during labour, all unknown
    - Dis-continuity of care is associated with loss of information, less attention to patient needs, delay of appropriate action – a concern for patient safety!
The development has led to experiments with types of birthing units

Especially in UK, Australia and Canada, small birth units in local areas has been transformed into freestanding midwifery units for low risk women (or new have been build)

Continuity midwifery models (often caseload midwifery) are introduced to increase the quality and safety of care
What is a midwifery unit exactly?

A clinical location, offering care around birth to **low risk women**, in which midwives take primary professional responsibility for care.

Some midwifery units are placed in large hospitals, **alongside** an obstetric unit.

Today we focus on **freestanding midwifery units** (FMU), that are placed in **small, local hospitals** or stand alone.

Obstetricians or paediatrician can not be called to the freestanding unit *(but in some units, an anaesthetic nurse or doctor for emergency back-up)*

no caesarean section can be performed;

– women are transferred by ambulance or helicopter (or in their own car) if sighs of complications arise

**HOWEVER, A MIDWIFERY UNIT IS NOT JUST A PHYSICAL PLACE**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Midwifery unit</th>
<th>Obstetric unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit shared philosophy of care</td>
<td>- e.g. active encouragement of mobility and use of upright labour/birth positions</td>
<td>No explicit shared philosophy of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No shared policy on mobility and use of birth positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwives</td>
<td>24 h shifts</td>
<td>8h and 12h shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of continuity</td>
<td>(maybe known midwife)</td>
<td>Limited continuity of carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one care</td>
<td>Continuous support</td>
<td>Rarely one-to-one care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on psycho-social needs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Often not continuous support in labour until 6(-8) cm dilatation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early labour:</td>
<td>Women invited to text or call the midwife on duty at any time</td>
<td>Women can call the labour ward but rarely speaks to the same midwife twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet environment</td>
<td>“feel at home”, make use of facilities</td>
<td>Busy environment, stay in birthing rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency assistance</td>
<td>anaesthesiologist/resuscitation-capable specialist nurse on site</td>
<td>Obstetric, anaesthesiological and paediatric service available on site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidural / interventions</td>
<td>requires transfer by ambulance – other things tried first</td>
<td>Epidural / interventions easily available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Too “good” to be safe?

Several retrospective studies from e.g. Norway, Canada, USA, England, Australia, Germany was available (some studies small or not recent)

Two studies with similar designs were conducted at almost the same time (published 2011-2012 - with very similar results):

• The Danish Birth Centre study: 1768 women (Aalborg University)
• The Birthplace of England study: > 65,000 women (Oxford University, National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit).
The Danish Birth Centre Study

Designed as a matched cohort study that investigated

- perinatal and maternal morbidity,
- birth complications
- birth interventions, and use of pain relief
- women’s birth experiences, care satisfaction
- and perceptions of patient-centred care elements

in two freestanding midwifery units and two obstetric units

in the same region

Only low risk women in both groups; 25% first time mothers

50 min transfer time to obstetric unit
Participants - The Danish Birth Centre study

**Midwifery unit**
- 839 primary participants
- 124 (14.8%) transferred during labour or <2 h post partum
- 13 (1.5%) transferred during post partum stay
- 839 primary participants analysed

**Obstetric unit**
- 839 primary participants
- Inclusion at the start of care in labour
- Analysis by intention-to-treat
- 839 control participants analysed
N of cases among the 839 participants
MIDWIFERY UNIT
N of cases among the 839 controls
OBSTETRIC UNIT

Apgar score < 7/1 min

Apgar score < 7/5 min

NICU admissions

NICU >48 h

Re-admission (0-28 days)

The Danish Birth Centre study & Birthplace of England study: no significant difference between groups
Interventions

The Danish Birth Centre study - and The Birthplace of England Study – also both found:

- Significant **30-60% reductions in all birth interventions** among women planning for birth in a freestanding midwifery unit
  
  - E.g. cesarean section RR 0.6, CI:0.3-0.9
## Birth complications
(Danish Birth Centre study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Midwifery unit N (%)</th>
<th>Obstetric unit N (%)</th>
<th>RR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal fetal heart rate:</td>
<td>34 (4.1)</td>
<td>98 (11.7)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2-0.5</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby not able to decent through pelvis</td>
<td>3 (0.4)</td>
<td>16 (1.9)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.05-0.6</td>
<td>0.0044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby born in irregular head position:</td>
<td>13 (1.6)</td>
<td>28 (3.3)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3-0.9</td>
<td>0.0201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder dystocia (obstetric emergency)</td>
<td>3 (0.4)</td>
<td>12 (1.4)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5-0.9</td>
<td>0.0352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Birth experience

- midwifery unit
- obstetric unit

Very negative
1.1 1.1 2.2 4.9 18.4 34.6 38.9 57.3

Outstanding
10 20 30 40 50 60

1
2
3
4
5
6
The new evidence made the well-estimated NICE institute (National institute for Clinical Excellence) conclude in the English guidelines for Normal Birth 2015:

“The evidence now shows that midwife-led care is safer than hospital care for women having a straightforward, low risk, pregnancy”

“This is because the rate of interventions, such as the use of forceps or an epidural, is lower and the outcome for the baby is no different compared with an obstetric unit".

“There is no reason why women at low risk of complications during labour should not have their baby in an environment in which they feel most comfortable”

Prof Mark Baker, NICE

NICE guidelines: http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg190/evidence
Transfers – overall and by parity

Transfer rates (%)

- Primiparas (25% of participants)
- Multiparas (75% of participants)
- Overall

2004: Primiparas 44.4, Multiparas 7, Overall 18.7
2006: Primiparas 24.6, Multiparas 5.7, Overall 9.7
Transfers intrapartum or >2h after birth

- Transfers Midwifery unit 1 (%)
- Transfers Midwifery unit 2 (%)
- All transfers (%)
In Denmark the national board of health so far has kept pushing for closure of small units.

To meet the problems, caseload midwifery has got great focus:

- Introduced small scale in almost all Danish obstetric units
- Introduced large scale in a few units (1/3 of women)
- 1 small obstetric unit is run exclusively by caseload group

Caseload midwifery may be introduced for several reasons:

- **Professional:** optimising care for all women, for special groups of high risk or vulnerable women - or simply for getting first birth right

- **Personal:** midwives personally motivated, attracts midwives to the unit, stimulates the job environment, development of skills

- **Economical:** to attract patients in competition with other units – and sometimes to cut cost
A high level of continuity is a key issue in achieving a high level of quality of care.

Definition:

- 2-3 midwives provide ante-, intra- and postpartum care for a caseload of women (e.g. 100-180 women) based on a shared philosophy of care.

- Always one of the midwives in the team on duty, providing continuous labour support if possible.
  - One midwife from the group in on call 24h a day, 7 days in a row.
  - One day a week: pregnancy care. All midwives in team present to ensure all women meet the whole team before birth.
Caseload midwives:

(Below: Two Danish caseload midwives preparing the birth tub)

- become very dedicated to women in their caseload
- experience their work as rewarding, meaningful and of better quality
- **Need control** from management to be replaced with **trust and responsibility**, **self-confidence** and self-management
- May find their own interests conflicting with the interests of management:
  - Managers may aim for the highest possible caseload - caseload midwives want to deliver the highest possible level of continuity and quality of care
- may burn out / get sick if:
  - the caseload is too big
  - they feel isolated and/or not well regarded
Points for consideration in the reorganisation of birth services

- Introduction of freestanding midwifery units and continuity midwifery models holds great potential for improvement of health and well-being among low risk women.

- Freestanding midwifery units is a safe, high quality care option for low risk women within a network of supporting obstetric units.

However – a successful (new) service need local involvement and support. All changes are deeply embedded in local context: no solution fits all. Local health professionals, services users but also local citizens should be involved, listened to and considered as resources.

Be aware that if several changes in organisational structures occur simultaneously, the chance of success may be smaller.

- And even more in case of changes in professional competences and roles (professionally rivalry).
Thank you for listening!

Contact:
Charlotte Overgaard

c@hst.aau.dk

Phone: 0045 2482 9815

Public Health & Epidemiology
Department of Health Science & Technology
Aalborg University, Denmark
Selected references - midwifery led care:


Introducing caseload midwifery:

The Lancet series on Midwifery 2014


References - freestanding midwifery units:

- NICE guidelines: [http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg190/evidence](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg190/evidence)


- The Birthplace of England Study (information, full reports and publications). National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit. Oxford University, UK. [https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/birthplace](https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/birthplace)