

Nourishing the relationship and encouraging the heart

Jean Patterson
Sub-Editor
NZ College of Midwives Journal



Each Easter for the last four years I have had the privilege to tramp with good friends through some of the most breath taking areas of Southland and Fiordland. This year in Milford we began the track with 36 strangers, with whom we shared in close proximity the challenges and joys of the walk, the bathrooms, bunkrooms and eating areas; curiously observing what each other wore, packed and ate. Tips and jokes were shared along with blister management and the virtues of different dehydrated meals and how long they needed to steep before eating.

On the steep climb to the pass, my colleague and I compared the challenge of the track and how it is akin to that of labour. The knowledge that only you can do it and that getting to the end requires persistence, sometimes courage, but always with the promise of the reward and sense of achievement at the end. And while the journey is our own it is less arduous with the company and care of friends encouraging the heart and lending logistical support when the challenge threatens to overwhelm us.

The vital role of relationships and caring support for successful childbirth experiences is a theme that emerges in the journal's articles in this issue. While dealing with vastly different topics the authors acknowledge how important this aspect of human behaviour is in the way in which birth is experienced by women and their families. This learning and relationship is shown in the first of our articles where Belinda Chapman shares with us the journey of a family who welcomed their baby Hope with anencephaly into their family. The experience was enhanced by the multidisciplinary team who facilitated wrap-around care freeing the family to use their energy to welcome and enjoy their brief time with Hope.

Relationships are also identified in El Banna and Jutel's article where support for women managing the distress and struggle to continue breastfeeding with a baby experiencing gastro-oesophageal reflux. This discursive review provides a new way of looking at the literature and finds a gap in the primary research for management strategies where pharmacological or formula feeding is not used. For this self-limiting condition encouragement and practical support with advice regarding postural strategies are advocated.

This role of support and information is also highlighted in Dixon, Skinner and Foureur's article, which provides a comprehensive overview of the emotional and hormonal pathways of labour and birth. The article explores

The vital role of relationships
and caring support for
successful childbirth
experiences is a theme that
emerges in the journal's
articles in this issue.

how the emotions orchestrated by the neuro-hormones prepare the woman and her body for the challenges of birth. Midwives able to share these processes and the signposts in labour enable women to have some sense of control, boosting their confidence in their physiology and ability to safely give birth.

As midwives, we are ideally placed to influence labour and support the physiological processes for normal birth, alert to processes and interventions that will interfere with this complex mix of emotional chemistry. This role of walking with women to help them discover their inner strength is the moral purpose of midwifery and helps keep women and their babies safe; a central concern for the women in final article.

Such information and support has the potential to contribute also to the woman's sense of safety; a topic addressed in the article by Howarth, Swain and Treharne. In this New Zealand study a small sample of first time mothers shared what they saw as a 'safety net' for them and their babies. They aspired to keep birth normal, make choices about their birthplace and to establish a relationship with a skilled midwife who would make timely decisions about their care.

So welcome to this the 48th edition of our own New Zealand College of Midwives journal. I hope you enjoy reading and considering the knowledge and challenges explored in the articles. Thank you also to the authors who took the time and effort to engage our interest in this diverse range of topics, which together address core aspects of our midwifery context. And just as we need the relationships and support of friends and colleagues in other aspects of our lives to achieve our goals, so too we are reminded of the vital importance of our midwifery partnerships and relationships with women and their families.