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COVID-19: The New Corona Virus Upsetting Our World

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Covid-19: The new corona virus upsetting our world

Editorial JAM for June issue 2020

This editorial should have been a celebration of the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife! Our last issue carried a really encouraging message from Franka Cadée, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) president.¹ The ICM sees this year of the Midwife as the first year of the Century of the Midwife and it is an opportunity to celebrate work of midwives across the globe. We had also hoped to highlight in this issue the tri-annual ICM Congress in Bali, Indonesia, but then, unexpectedly, the new corona virus came along. It upset our (and many other people's) plans as unexpected events tend to do. In the word of Scotland's most famous poet, Robert Burns:

The best laid schemes o mice an men
Gang aft agley²

In the maternity care context the modern day English translation from Scots would be: “the best-laid plans of midwives and women often go awry.” No many could have predicted late last year that the world (at least large parts of it) would go into lock down. Who would have foreseen that countries like India would stop more than a billion people from their daily living and work to reduce the spread of a previously unknown virus?

Coronavirus (SARS-COV-2) is a new strain of coronavirus causing COVID-19, and it is related the common cold, MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). The emergency of COVID-19 in Wuhan Province in China took the world by surprise. To date more than 5½ million people have been tested positive for the virus and more than one third of a million people have died (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>). It is reminder to all of us that we need to stay alert in the field of Public Health.

Regardless of the disaster, be it an earthquake in Pakistan or Nepal, a drought in India or Pakistan or a flood in Bangladesh or the treat of an infectious disease like COCID-19 globally women are still getting pregnant and babies will still be born and therefore women still need midwives to support them. The corona virus outbreak shows the importance of a good primary health care system of which midwifery is a key element.

There is no evidence of vertical transmission from a Covid-19 positive pregnant woman to her foetus, but the mother (or other family members and health professionals) can infect the newborn baby through the spread of droplets. Women and midwives may struggle with establishing breastfeeding, especially when sick COVID-positive mothers give birth to

babies. Newborn babies are also tested for COVID, and these all steps of care may make women and their partners more anxious. Many women due to fear of getting COVID-19 infection do not like to deliver in a hospital and prefer to stay at home to deliver their baby. Fortunately, many useful guidelines have been published and many countries have adopted some. In early March the RCGO (Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology) published advice for healthcare professionals on COVID-19.³ This online publication is regularly updated and offers advice: (1) for staff to share with pregnant women: (2) on caring for women with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 11-23; and (3) on caring for women following recovery from confirmed COVID-19. Moreover, World Health Organization has a website with useful advice on COVID-19 on pregnancy and childbirth).⁴ Mothers and midwives are desperately seeking information and we need to guide them to high-quality evidence-based information and helplines offering advice on breast feeding, weaning, and to do when they become infected with COVID-19. Moreover, midwives are seeking guidance from their governments, midwifery associations, and the WHO.

Our thoughts are with the families and friends of midwives across the globe, but particularly in Iran, who died from COVID-19. Moreover, we grieve for our Afghan midwives who died with mothers and newborn babies in a brutal attack on the maternity ward of the Dasht-e-Barchi hospital in the capital Kabul. We send our condolences to the families of midwives and mothers and babies who have died. Many left young children behind, we pray for all midwives, mothers and babies who passed away, and we condemned such traumatic attacks.

We also like to inform our readers that the tri-annual ICM Congress in Indonesia has been postponed till May-June 2021. This is still the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, and COVID-19 reminds us of the importance of both professions globally! Readers of the *Journal of Asian Midwives* please stay safe, to take their work practice of hand hygiene home to their friends and family to educate them and to remind them about the importance of washing your hands, not touching your face, and so on!

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