

The Doctoral Midwifery Research Society: a concrete structure for supporting doctoral midwifery research

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When I launched the Doctoral Midwifery Research Society (DMRS), it was 'blue sky thinking' materialising into a concrete structure... a midwifery dream come true. I believe this is a major development for serious midwife researchers to use as a landscape for designing, drawing, imprinting and showcasing high-quality midwifery research. However, I do hope the DMRS will be able to grow fast enough to keep up with the modern needs of midwives living in the 'instantaneous age' where demands for faster, shorter and more transient communication pressurise us every day. Life for many of us is like that described by Wittel (2001: 51) where 'network sociality consists of fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations; of ephemeral but intense encounters'. The era of electronic connectivity is at our finger-tips and modern media technology can be used to bring the gold nuggets of research interviews, news from the latest research reports, lectures from visiting professors and communications from discussion-forums to the membership rapidly and in some cases instantaneously. We are living in the 'information age' and media technology is one key that may actually facilitate our survival in this 'network-supported society'. Living in 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) is already a reality for many of us and one in which the DMRS will have to become a strong and increasingly more visible resource. It is our intention, in time, with adequate funding, to be in a stronger position to harness many of the benefits of modern technology to communicate with each other, albeit through 'articulate' technology, 'telemidwifery', 'podcasts', 'skype' or email.

The origination of this new society arose from several factors – the major one being a growing number of midwives with PhDs in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the world with no distinctly visible or tangible forum for discussion, debate and community development. In addition, as midwifery researchers mature and leave the seed bed with bursting shoots of new knowledge, they need nourishment that comes from cross-fertilisation of ideas and the sharing of fruits from labour-intensive searches for meaning and understanding. This appetite for communion can only be satisfied through sharing of our time and experience with each other. Therefore, the overall aim of the DMRS is to advance midwifery practice through the promotion, development and dissemination of midwifery research. I define midwifery research as 'a rigorous process of inquiry that aims to provide knowledge of and insights into the efficacy and effectiveness of midwifery practice; its effects on women, babies, parents, family and society. It includes research on the education and training of midwives, the use of information and communication technologies, the organisation and delivery of maternity services, and employment conditions and terms affecting midwives' working lives'.

A fundamental objective of the DMRS is to 'provide quality support and guidance to doctoral and post-doctoral midwife researchers regionally, nationally and internationally'. A major commitment of the society is to provide – whenever possible – 'a platform for midwife researchers to engage with academics, peers, colleagues, service users, commissioners and policy-makers in a strategic endeavour to ensure best evidence is indeed underpinning everyday practice'. This

is in keeping with the strategic plan for research and development in Northern Ireland (Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland, 2007) and the DMRS aims to play its part in:

- Developing an enabling infrastructure to support research that will impact on maternity care, management and service delivery
- Building the research confidence and skills of midwives working in health and personal social services (HPSS)
- Working in partnership with the HPSS research and development (R&D), related institutions and organisations to strengthen the quality and impact of midwifery research
- Supporting midwives to develop models of dissemination to effectively transfer and diffuse key outcomes for public health arising from midwifery and midwifery-related research
- Ensuring patient and public involvement in HPSS R&D
- Placing a strong emphasis on 'doing' and 'using' research for the good of society and for the advancement of midwifery practice.

The DMRS is sponsored by the Northern Ireland R&D Office and can be accessed from the website: doctoralmidwiferysociety.org. The first meeting used podcasts to capture Professor Billie Hunter's inspirational lecture on qualitative research (Hunter, 2007). The original lecture can be heard via the DMRS website or read in *Evidence Based Midwifery (EBM)*. The second meeting used video to capture an invigorating lecture on metasynthesis by Professor Soo Downe (Downe, 2008). This video can again be viewed on the website or the paper read in this edition of *EBM*.

In conclusion, the DMRS has been developed to meet a need in midwives for a research menu that offers a wide and varied assortment of delights. It is important to remember the key ingredients for its emergence came from midwifery pioneers, who fought to change our stable diet and introduce research and all of its nomenclature into our undergraduate and postgraduate curriculae. These changes in curriculae, professional practice standards, evidence-informed practice and government-led policies have all been influential in building strong edifices for the future development of midwifery research. The DMRS is a concrete foundation ready for pillars of knowledge to be placed and a building of great architectural beauty to arise.

References

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