

Doctoral midwifery: an investment for the profession

As more midwives develop highly sophisticated skills in research methodology and achieve the highest possible academic qualification – the doctorate – consideration of its investment and outcome is worthwhile.

All four UK countries have doctorally-prepared midwives, and numbers range from zero to seven in any single university, with an average of two. Funding is variable, with a small number having secured research and development monies. A rough estimate of the number of midwives in doctoral programmes in the UK based on recent personal communication with professors of midwifery is 50.

Those fortunate to be undertaking doctoral research appear to be university department employees or studentship holders – very few are self-funding. It is unfortunate that there are no specific monies at research and development departments ring-fenced for midwives to undertake PhDs. However, this situation may change. For example, midwifery research has a distinct identity in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008, and I would argue that this is indicative of midwifery's developing research and development profile.

The importance of doctoral research is clear: future midwifery will be shaped by leadership in education and research today. Knowledge development and dissemination are critical components of any professional organisation, and while direct-entry midwifery is a major development, the retention of newly-qualified recruits is the new challenge. These midwives need to be assured of an academic as well as a clinical career pathway to

enable them to make career choices.

Adequate investment in midwifery educators to prepare them for doctorate studies needs to be carefully planned and monitored to ensure they have sufficient support and resources, and peers need to be ready to share the extra workload while their colleagues attain doctorates. The more doctoral midwives, the greater chance there is of midwives engaging in clinical research – protecting and nurturing our young recruits, midwife educators and new doctoral students is a major challenge for the whole profession and one that we must all be ready to embrace.

Achieving a PhD is a particularly strenuous endeavour, and a rite of passage. Any midwife who has been through the process will tell about the journey into the unknown, and many of the problems faced are not the anticipated academic challenges but more to do with role conflict.

Preparing midwives for post-doctoral midwifery is as important as preparing new entrants to the profession, and doctoral midwives should not feel forced to migrate to academic institutions, but should be encouraged and actively supported in maintaining clinical posts. This requires investment, commitment and support – teamwork, sacrifices and perseverance will be needed to forge a shared vision for the profession of midwifery.

Marlene Sinclair
Editor

Evidence Based Midwifery editorial panels

UK editorial panel

Dr Soo Downe, University of Central Lancashire, England
 Dr Billie Hunter, University of Wales Swansea, Wales
 Dr Margaret McGuire, midwifery development officer, NHS Scotland
 Dr Marianne Mead, University of Hertfordshire, England
 Professor Jane Sandall, King's College, London, England
 Chair: Louise Silvertown, RCM deputy general secretary
 Dr Marlene Sinclair (professional editor), University of Ulster, Northern Ireland
 Dr Hora Soltani, Derby City General Hospital, England
 Dr Andrew Symon, University of Dundee, Scotland
 Emma Godfrey (editor), McMillan-Scott
 Danny Ratnaik (deputy editor), McMillan-Scott

International editorial panel

Professor Cecily Begley, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland
 Assistant clinical professor Debra Erickson-Owens, University of Rhode Island, US
 Dr Heather Hancock, University of South Australia
 Professor Edith Hillan, University of Toronto, Canada
 Kathy Herschderfer, secretary general, International Confederation of Midwives
 Dr Helen Lugina, Muhimbili University College, Tanzania
 Dr Mallavarapu Prakasamma, director, Academy for Nursing Studies, India

Editorial advisory panel

Joseph B Cunningham, lecturer in research methods and statistics, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland
 Frances Day-Stirk, RCM director of learning, research and practice development
 Professor Allan Templeton, president, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
 Dr Rhona McInnes, University of Glasgow, Scotland
 Sue Macdonald, RCM education and research manager
 Simon Morrison, RCM head of communications and marketing
 Helen Spiby, University of Leeds, England
 Cathy Warwick, chair, midwifery committee, Nursing and Midwifery Council, UK