

Description

Improving Ergonomics: Keeping Well at Work

Cheryl Samuels (she/her) – Midwifery Lecturer, University of Suffolk

Instagram @the_holistic_midwife

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Introduction

Self-care is a phrase that is often used recently, especially with the additional stresses and strains that the pandemic has delivered. With a common general focus on the care provided to women, birthing people and their families, consideration for midwives' own wellbeing can sometimes be low down on the list of priorities. So, for the new year, I challenge you all to be more mindful of yourself, your health, and your wellbeing needs. After all, what will benefit you will in turn benefit the people who you care for and make services overall more efficient. Also look out for your colleagues and students; it's often when observing others that we can see potential hazards more clearly. An important element of professional self-care is working with the correct equipment to ensure optimal outcomes for the person receiving care and to decrease the risk of injury for the practitioner.

Impact on the midwife

Back injury can occur through having prolonged bad posture when excessive strain is placed on the muscles of the back. Bad posture is the most frequent cause of chronic lower back pain (persisting for more than 12 weeks).[1] Common situations in clinical care where this can occur include:

- Supporting a labouring woman or birthing person
- During birth • Perineal suturing
- Assisting with breast/chestfeeding
- Making beds.

Activities such as sitting incorrectly, stooped posture, and asymmetric posture can lead to excessive pressure on intervertebral discs, muscles and ligaments, causing injury.[2] Employers have a responsibility to reduce the risk of injury occurring as far as reasonably practicable and it is important for midwives to recognise situations in which they are at risk of injury from poor posture and take steps to reduce the risk of injury.[3,4]

For example, ensuring the correct equipment is available for perineal suturing in a birth centre is essential, having access to couches that can easily be transported between rooms on wheels, with electric height and backrest adjustments and fit for purpose stirrups should be the minimum standard for every birth centre. Antenatal clinics are also

another area where correct equipment ergonomics are vital in ensuring examinations are performed safely, quickly, and comfortably without the strains of repeated poor posture positions. Having access to the right equipment is crucial in facilitating optimal care and reducing the risk of injury for practitioners.[5]

Impact on the woman or birthing person

Having the correct ergonomic equipment will also provide benefits for the women you are caring for. When performing perineal examination and suturing, good lighting and correct positioning of the person will ensure the whole perineal area is accessible with clear visibility of all structures involved. This will lead to accurate visual assessment, which is essential for the correct diagnosis of degree of any perineal trauma. Correct diagnosis and treatment will provide optimal outcomes for perineal healing and postnatal pelvic function.[5] It is also essential to position the woman on suitable equipment comfortably and appropriately for clear visibility of the genitalia and this will aid in promoting dignity and avoiding any unnecessary pain, trauma or distress for them.[5]

The environment that midwives work in and the equipment used is an important aspect of professional self-care and optimal clinical outcomes that should not be overlooked. Creating a safe and practical care setting has both short- and long-term benefits for professionals and the individuals they care for, as discussed above and can help to provide maternity services that are more efficient and safer for everyone. **TPM**

For more information on professional self care, visit Croyde Medical

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