

Enhancing the Role of Maternity Support Workers in Labour Ward Settings

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Objective

To explore the potential of maternity support workers (MSWs) in becoming a vital component of labour ward settings, supporting midwives and improving maternity care delivery.

Background

Maternity support workers play an essential role in maternity services, yet their involvement in labour ward settings remains limited. In our centre, 12 MSWs are scheduled for day and night shifts; however, their current roles involve minimal engagement in direct childbirth support. Expanding their roles to work more closely with midwives can significantly enhance team efficiency, reduce midwifery stress and fatigue, and improve patient care.

Implications

Expanding the role of MSWs provides a sustainable solution to the current midwifery workforce crisis. Enhanced roles would reduce the burden on midwives, encouraging better work-life balance and job satisfaction. Furthermore, promoting MSWs as an essential part of the maternity team may attract younger generations to pursue midwifery, helping to address recruitment challenges.

Conclusion

Integrating maternity support workers more effectively into labour ward settings has the potential to transform maternity care delivery. Training and empowering MSWs to work alongside midwives can strengthen maternity services, enhance patient outcomes, and provide a more supportive and efficient work environment. To achieve this, clear guidelines, regular training, and collaborative team dynamics must be established. Encouraging MSW involvement is a step forward in improving maternity care and fostering the next generation of midwifery professionals.

Proposal

Integrating MSWs into labour ward settings can bridge the gap between midwifery shortages and the growing demands of maternity care. MSWs should be actively involved in childbirth and labour processes under midwife supervision. This involves assisting with basic patient care, monitoring vital signs, emotional support for women in labour, and preparation of delivery equipment. Regular participation in PROMPT (Practical Obstetric Multi-Professional Training) can equip MSWs to recognize emergencies and respond effectively, enhancing team dynamics during critical situations. Furthermore, MSWs can take up administrative tasks, such as documentation and organization of supplies, allowing midwives to focus on clinical care.

The MSW role could also be an extended career opportunity for outpatient nurses, providing them a pathway into maternity settings. This would not only strengthen the workforce but also improve staff retention by offering varied career progression routes. Additionally, MSWs can be trained to provide postnatal care, breastfeeding support, and help new mothers with newborn care, promoting continuity of care.