

## ROLE OF MIDWIFE IN COVID – 19 PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

*India has over two million nurse-midwives and nearly 900 000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs). In its extraordinary leadership in midwifery, in addition to the already existing workforce, the Government of India has committed to an additional 85 000 midwives by 2023. WHO applauds this move and recognizes investment in midwifery services as an investment towards health for all. In 2020, as the first batch of professional midwives initiate their training, WHO takes pride in supporting the government in the design and implementation of this policy initiative. India is progressing rapidly and there is a strong momentum for furthering quality midwifery services across the country. In India, each year 35 000 women die during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period; there are 272 000 stillbirths, and 562 000 babies die during the first month of their life. Midwifery care has the potential to prevent many of these deaths. Frontline health workers including midwives are at the forefront of COVID-19 response, going beyond their call of duty and risking their own lives to provide essential health services. Amidst these challenges, midwives are providing quality midwifery care to women and newborns in health facilities or the field, safeguarding public health. Midwifery as a service recognizes pregnancy, labour, birth and post-natal period as a healthy and profound experience that a woman goes through in her life.*

**Key Words:** nurse-midwives, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives, COVID-19, Frontline health workers

### Introduction

There are many profound experiences a woman goes through in life and the memorable ones are pregnancy, labour, child birth and the postnatal period. Midwifery is that service which recognizes and makes these experiences a healthy one. Midwives are in the frontline of COVID-19 response, risking their own lives for providing quality midwifery care to the women and newborns in all health facilities. Despite all these challenges the lifesaving support rendered by the midwives provides unique opportunities in preventing COVID – 19

### Role of Midwife during Antenatal Period:

The midwife provides most of the care during the antenatal period. Her role is vital in prevention and treatment of COVID – 19 during this crucial period.

### She is responsible for:

- **Regular information on COVID-19 to the mothers**

The midwife should make sure that the antenatal mothers make SMS a habit.

S – Sanitize the hands. Encourage her to sanitise her hands regularly or wash her hands using soap and water for 20 seconds following the correct technique.

M – Mask has to be worn by her whenever she is out. Instruct her never to reuse the same mask and if washable to wash it effectively with detergent. She should be informed to never touch her mask and to keep her hands away from eyes nose and mouth.

S – Social distancing has to be maintained by antenatal mothers throughout their pregnancy and even later. A minimum of two meters distance should be maintained by her and instruct her to avoid crowded places such as malls, weddings, etc.

- **The mother to identify COVID-19 symptoms**

The midwife should make sure that the antenatal mothers are informed enough to identify the COVID – 19 symptoms such as fever, cough, fatigue, loss of taste and smell and breathing difficulty. Any of the symptoms should never be neglected and the antenatal mother should immediately contact the health centre for further care.

- **Combating misinformation on COVID-19 and pregnancy**

As a midwife, she should ensure that all misconceptions and misinformation with regard to COVID – 19 and pregnancy has to be addressed and correct information to be disseminated.

Antenatal mothers could have questions if they are at high risk for COVID – 19. There is no such evidence, however as the immune system of the antenatal mothers could be compromised and if the mothers had any other respiratory illnesses, she could be at risk for COVID – 19.

The antenatal mothers could also have misconceptions that if they had already been affected with COVID – 19, they are immune to it and they may not get COVID-19 again. The midwife should make certain that COVID-19 could recur and that she has to follow the precautions even if she had been affected earlier.

If the antenatal mother was in contact with a COVID - 19 positive person, but she has been tested negative, it does not mean that she could not be affected. She has to wait and watch for any COVID – 19 symptoms which would possibly show up in a few days.

There is a myth that drinking and gargling warm water every 15 minutes kills or flushes out COVID – 19 from the system. The midwife should educate the antenatal mothers that warm water would only soothe the throat and provide comfort and not remove the virus from the body.

Though vaccinations are available against COVID – 19, it is not recommended for pregnant and lactating mothers as they were not a part of the anti-corona virus vaccine clinical trial under the emergency use authorisation of various countries. There could be many more questions haunting the minds of antenatal mothers and it is the duty of the midwife to clear them all with appropriate information and guidance.

### **Role of Midwife if The Pregnant Woman is Tested Positive:**

It would be a terrible experience for the antenatal mother to go through this phase and as a midwife she has to do everything to keep the pregnant woman calm. If the symptoms are mild, home care has to be emphasised. Advise her not to panic. She should avoid visiting anybody or use public transport. She should follow all COVID – 19 precautions and self-quarantine herself. She should not share her utensils, towel, beddings etc. with other family members. She must continue to wear mask at home and wash hands regularly. All the surfaces she came in contact with should be disinfected with 70% isopropyl alcohol and all her family members should be insisted to seek medical advice in preventive medications.

Good nutrition is necessary before during and after infection. The pregnant woman should maintain a healthy diet including protective foods rich in vitamins and mineral to enhance immunity. Foods such as cereals, oils/fats and sugar should be added to the diet to provide energy to the body. Body building foods rich on proteins like pulses, animal foods, milk and milk products needs to be included in the diet. Immunity boosters like ginger and garlic, herbal tea, golden milk could be of great help too. She should drink water, warm or normal adequately and keep herself well hydrated.

The disease may also have an impact on the emotional well-being of the mother. The woman may have fear and worry about her health and the health of her family. She could also fear about social stigma. Along with these she could have irritability, anger, confusion, frustration, loneliness, denial, depression, insomnia, anxiety and despair. In moments like this the midwife could be in touch with the mother and counsel her to remain calm, stay connected with her loved ones, relive her hobbies, take adequate rest and perform light exercise if her condition permits. The midwife can share positive stories

of those who have recovered to uplift her emotional well-being and fill her with positivity.

The antenatal mother should be advised to monitor her symptoms. Some symptoms get better on their own while others require medications. If she experiences worsening shortness of breath/trouble breathing or coughing, persistent fever for more than three days, pressure on the chest, inability to wake or stay awake, bluish lips or face and when saturation level drops below 95%, she should seek emergency medical help immediately. The helpline and other important emergency contact number should be made accessible to the mother.

### **Role of Midwife During Intra-Natal Period:**

During this pandemic especially the second wave has been a treat not only to the mothers but also the midwives. Caring for the woman during the intra-natal period has been challenging. Even though, the midwife's duty is to ensure that the woman admitted to the labour room is treated with respect and dignity. The woman in labour could be allowed a companion of her choice in the labour room. Timely information should be communicated and doubts if any must be cleared. The woman may be anxious if the baby could also be affected if she is tested positive. The midwife should make it clear that there is very less evidence that corona virus passes through body fluids and vaginal delivery is never a problem in COVID – 19 positive woman. However the woman may choose the mode of delivery if not contraindicated. If the mother is too weak and exhausted a cesarean section would be recommended. Appropriate pain relief strategies should be adopted to prevent exhaustion and to provide comfort. Throughout the labour the woman must be provided with moral and midwifery support and the same intra-natal protocols need to be followed along with COVID – 19 precautions.

### **Role of Midwife during Postnatal Period:**

Even during the postnatal period the mother should follow COVID-19 precautions in order to prevent the newborn from being infected. The midwife should ensure that breastfeeding is initiated and skin to skin contact and rooming - in is followed. Unless the postnatal mother is too sick to feed the baby, breastfeeding should never be stopped. Expressed breast milk or milk from human bank can be provided where direct breastfeeding is

contraindicated. The woman during postnatal period is vulnerable for mental illness such as postnatal blues, postnatal depression and postnatal psychosis. It is necessary for the midwife to prevent it by maintaining the mental health of the mother and to identify the symptoms if any at the earliest. She can touch and bond with her baby but must keep in mind the COVID – 19 precautions.

### **Role of Midwife in Family Planning:**

Statistics have shown that there has been a surge in pregnancies and a spike in unwanted pregnancies too during this pandemic. It is the great responsibility of the midwife to educate the woman and her partner about the temporary and the permanent methods of family planning not forgetting the due importance of emergency contraceptives.

### **Conclusion:**

Midwife: as the meaning says 'with the woman', was always there, is always there and will always be there for the woman throughout her significant life experiences and even during this COVID – 19 pandemic. Together the woman and the midwife can overcome this situation and provide a better future to the upcoming generation. Stay safe.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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