

A Book for Midwives: Care for Pregnancy, Birth, and Women's Health, 2nd edition

by Susan Klein, Suellen Miller, and Fiona Thomson. Berkeley, CA: The Hesperian Foundation, 2004. \$25.00, softcover.

Reviewed by: Ina May Gaskin, CPM, MA, Executive Director, The Farm Midwifery Center, Summertown, TN.

More than 98% of maternal deaths associated with pregnancy and childbirth occur in the countries of the world that are most economically devastated. It is estimated that the total number of women dying during pregnancy or around the time of birth stands at nearly 600,000 each year.

A Book for Midwives: Care for Pregnancy, Birth, and Women's Health was first published in 1995. In the 1995 edition, Susan Klein, CNM, was inspired to create a tool that would enable midwives, regardless of their educational background or country of origin, "to exercise independent judgment and to make the best possible decisions at each birth." Susan Klein died before its completion and, fortunately, Suellen Miller, CNM, MPH, took over as Medical Editor.

We now have the new edition, completely revised and updated, but still faithful to the original vision. The list of collaborators and reviewers is truly impressive and includes midwives and midwifery students from 10 countries.

Like the first edition, the book is designed for use in countries where literacy rates are low. It is rich with clear, attractive illustrations, which clarify the text and depict women and midwives whose appearance and dress are drawn from a variety of traditional cultures from different parts of the world.

This new edition has an improved sensitivity to the needs of midwives and community health workers in different parts of the world. In the early pages of the book, for instance, the principle of continuing education and lifelong self-questioning is well covered. So is the idea of improving health by sharing knowledge with other health workers and midwives. Consistently practical, the book advises that midwives sit in a circle with everyone on the same level. "This puts you in the same place as everyone else, and shows that you are not the only one with knowledge."

The new edition stresses that men, whether they are husbands, fathers, sons, community leaders, spiritual leaders, bosses, or others, should be encouraged to be partners in improving women's health. Suggestions are given how men and women working together can come up with practical solutions to the obstacles that exist in getting women with problems to a hospital in places where there is inadequate transportation for women. For instance, a creative solution was reached in West Africa,

where someone suggested that if a woman needed help in labor, she could ride with a truck driver to the hospital. Villagers, truck drivers, and their union collaborated with the midwives to create a working solution to a seemingly intractable problem.

Chapter 2, "Treating Health Problems," replaces its counterpart in the first edition with an even clearer explanation of how to find the causes of health problems, the best treatment, and how to make change in one's community to prevent such problems. In this edition, the authors designate not just two types of medicine (traditional and modern) but 3 types (traditional, Western, and non-Western, which includes acupuncture, Ayurveda, and homeopathy). This chapter also includes a small section on medicine and greed and illustrates how they can lead to widespread health risks. It tells the story of how DES was developed by Eli Lilly and was widely prescribed before its harmful effects were noticed. Another valuable addition to this chapter is the section on how to carefully assess women to look deeply to prevent problems. One example shows how identification of the causes of long labors in women who have poor health, girls with abnormally small pelvises, or those who are pregnant too young, can pave the way to initiation of interventions that will prevent obstetric fistulas from occurring.

This new edition includes an excellent new chapter on preventing infection and a more detailed chapter on prenatal checkups. The organization of the section on intrapartum care is improved, discussing complications that might occur (and their early signs) together with the discussion of normal labor and birth.

Also new is the material on emergency care for problems after miscarriage or abortion, as well as a new chapter on inserting IUDs, a section on speculum exams, and one on how to treat tetanus.

The new material that may be most controversial is the chapter on manual vacuum aspiration. Clearly, this chapter was included in this edition because of current awareness of the large numbers of women who die from unsafe abortions.

I can't say enough about what a valuable addition this book is to the worldwide literature on midwifery. In this reviewer's opinion, it belongs in every midwife's library, wherever she or he lives in this world. Congratulations to the authors and to everyone who took part in this important collaborative effort. Susan Klein would smile to know how far her original vision has reached.

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