

Module 6: History of midwifery

Introduction



Learning outcomes

At the completion of this module you should be able to:

- Critically analyse the history of midwives and women healers, and the impact of historical factors on contemporary midwifery practice.



Video

Watch this topic introduction video.




Read

Textbook: Donnison, J. (2011). A history of the midwifery profession in the united kingdom. In S. MacDonald & J. Magill-Cuerden (Eds.) *Mayes' Midwifery* (14th Ed.). (pp.13-32). Sydney: Bailliere Tindall.

Fahy, K. (2007). *An Australian history of the subordination of midwifery*. Retrieved from http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1929&context=hahs_pubs



Davis, A. (2013, July). Drunken midwives and snooty surgeons: a short history of giving birth. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/drunken-midwives-and-snooty-surgeons-a-short-history-of-giving-birth-16208> 

Powerpoint: [M7.1a Role of the midwife lecture .ppt](#) 



Discussion Board

This module has an assessable component related to the discussion board. Please see the activity below and your subject outline for more information.

History of midwifery

Midwifery has a rich history and this module will only touch on some of the issues involved in the telling of the history. Many of the events that have occurred in the development of the profession of midwifery have an impact on the care that you will give as a midwife today. It is therefore important that you have an understanding of some of this history so that you can recognise trends in the development of the profession.

Closely linked to the history of midwifery, is the history of women and childbirth. Several of the Readings that I have included for this module will indicate how these areas overlap and have impacted on one another.

The following readings, are all considered classic survival texts on the history of midwifery. Although they are not current, they continue to be included as we seek to learn from history and the principles they espouse are contemporary.

The first reading is from an excellent book by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English (1973). You may be interested in obtaining a copy of this book yourself and reading it in full as it is only brief.



Read


e-Reserve: Ehrenreich, B., & English, D. (1973). Witchcraft and medicine in the middle ages. In *Witches, midwives and nurses: A history of women healers* (pp. 6-20). New York: The Feminist Press.


Textbook: Davis & Hunter. (2015). The place of birth. In *Midwifery: Preparation for practice* (3rd ed., ch. 7, pp. 132-153).

The following readings look at the 'medicalisation' of childbirth and at how the role of the midwife, when in decline, affected the care given to women during the childbearing period. As a profession today, midwives are still trying to regain their lost independence in caring for women. The following readings give an understanding as to how the obstetric medical profession has impacted on midwifery care.



Read

e-Reserve: Inch, S. (1989). The evolution of the midwife. In *Birthrights: A parent's guide to modern childbirth* (pp. 18-25). London: Green Print. http://primo.unilinc.edu.au/CSU:CSU:csu_equellaa1813938-86f2-4e76-b148...etc 

e-Reserve: Donnison, J. (2000). The decline of the midwife. In E. R. van Teijlingen, G.W. Lewis, P. G. McCafferty & M. Porter (Eds.), *Midwifery and the medicalization of childbirth: Comparative perspectives* (pp. 101-115). New York: Nova Science. http://primo.unilinc.edu.au/CSU:CSU:csu_equella40968016-152c-4c1f-8395...etc 



Activity

Assessment item 3: Discussion board posting on the history of midwifery (satisfactory/unsatisfactory).

Upon completion of this module, reflect on the history of the midwifery profession. What do you see as the main factors that now impinge on our profession?

Based on the history of midwifery both in Australia and elsewhere, how do you perceive the future of the midwifery profession in Australia and the role you play in the future of the profession?

Condense your ideas into a short (100 words or so) posting to the discussion board.