Launch of a new textbook for midwives in Australia and New Zealand

I very recently received a copy of Midwifery: Preparation for Practice. So far I have had a couple of hours to look at it but I think it is going to be a wonderful textbook from which to teach midwifery. Pairman, Pincombe, Thorogood and Tracy take an entirely new approach to midwifery knowledge which they have conceptualised through a midwifery lens. This compares very favourably with other texts which have historically just reproduced the same type of information within the same old chapters and categories without thinking it thorough from a midwife-woman perspective. This new philosophical and theoretical approach is coupled with the provision up to date evidence for practice. I’ve sent it out for a couple of reviews but for readers who are keen to have an overview of this exciting new text we have reproduced the book’s foreword by the chief executives of the Australian and New Zealand Colleges of Midwives; Barb Vernon and Karen Guilliland.

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Foreword for Midwifery: Preparation for Practice
It is not often that one comes across a midwifery textbook like this one. This volume brings together a team of midwives from both Australia and New Zealand who are leaders in their field and who share in these pages a wealth of knowledge and expertise in midwifery practice, education, research and regulation.

Yet the credentials of the authors, while impressive, are not the only reason this book is a ‘must have’ for every student of midwifery. This book’s unique contribution is its focus on both the universal principle that underpins midwifery philosophy and practice — that of partnership with women — and midwifery autonomy in practice.

The midwifery partnership between a woman and midwife working together to achieve the best outcome for that mother and baby differentiates it from other models of care, where the health professional assumes expertise over the mother. It is this point of difference that gives society the body of knowledge called midwifery.

Drawing on midwifery partnership, this book approaches midwifery care from the perspective of a midwife as a primary health practitioner, based in the community but interfacing with hospitals and specialists as necessary to meet the needs of individual women. It explores both autonomous practice and collaborative practice, and is the first textbook to discuss midwifery practice in the context of community and primary health rather than hospital-based maternity services.

Just as childbirth is far more than a physiological process, the art and science of midwifery is more than a study of the female human body and its reproductive powers. Like childbirth, midwifery occurs in a social, political and historical context that shapes the practice of midwifery in any given time and place. It is therefore essential that all would-be midwives have a sound understanding of this context, and an awareness of how it may influence their own practice in providing care to women. This book provides a clear and accessible introduction to the historical and contemporary context of midwifery practice in Australia and New Zealand, and examines practice within the professional frameworks of the philosophy and standards of both the Australian and New Zealand Colleges of Midwives.

Midwifery care in Australia and New Zealand is currently provided to women in very different maternity care systems. In Australia, most midwives work in public or private hospitals, providing professional care to women as best they can without the benefit of being able to get to know the women they care for. Lacking prescribing rights, independent access to public funding, and professional indemnity insurance, midwives are mostly obliged to work within services that segment women and their midwives into antenatal, labour and postnatal wards and limit the opportunities for relationship building. Midwives in New Zealand, by contrast, are free to practise in either hospitals or the community. All can access public funding for their professional services, have prescribing rights, and work in partnership with women and with each other if they choose to.

The freedom to practise in partnership with women cannot be taken for granted. Policy and legislative change in New
Zealand has been achieved through twenty years of sustained political advocacy by midwives and women in partnership. Even so, twenty years ago, when New Zealand midwives and women were in the heart of their 'save the midwife campaign', they could hardly have envisaged how successful the reinstatement of the midwifery profession would be in today's health system. In focusing on midwifery autonomy and midwifery partnership, this textbook reinforces for all midwives the achievements of women and midwives in giving childbirth back to women and their whanau. It reminds us of what a struggle it was, and still is, to keep women central to the birthing process, and each chapter provides valuable knowledge and guidance to both experienced and new midwives that will help ensure that midwifery continues to keep women and their babies safely at the centre of practice decisions.

Similarly, advocacy by midwives and women has also been under way in Australia for the past decade, and is beginning to bear fruit in creating greater freedom for midwives to practise and for women to choose their own midwife. However, there remains much to be done before midwifery in Australia achieves the level of professional autonomy and responsibility that is commonplace in New Zealand and other developed nations.

Yet for all the differences between maternity services in these two countries, midwifery remains universally constant, guided by the same theoretical and practice knowledge, and skills that combine to make midwifery such a vital profession for women and babies. The commonalities far outweigh the differences, and this book is rich with up-to-date and relevant information aimed at supporting all midwives to practise autonomously and ever with an eye on the needs of the women they care for.

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