Spiritual Care in Secular Midwifery - The Danish Case

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DENMARK

- Northern Europe
- Protestants (77% members of church)
- Nearly 6 mio inhabitants
- Life expectancy (both sexes) 78.6 y
- Nearly 60,000 births in 2016
- 1.79 child/woman in 2016

SOME DANISH MIDWIFERY HISTORY

- Oldest regulations for midwives
  - Sweden 1711
  - Denmark and Norway 1714
- Midwives ought to be
  - Trained
  - Examined by ‘medici’
  - Authorized
  - …could lose authorization if they left a poor woman in labour to earn more money by looking after a rich one instead…

From 1785, all midwives in Copenhagen had a sign on their house so that they could be found when needed…
BEGINNING OF LIFE

- Birth
  - potentially transforming life
  - impacting existential meaning
- In research found to be:
  - Intense
  - Unique
  - Mysterious
  - Powerful
  - Transforming
  - Unifying
  - Meaningful
  - Transcendent
- Rebirth of woman into a mother

INTEREST IN SPIRITUAL CARE TRAINING? WHO

- Observation in 18 countries of how spirituality, religion and personal beliefs (SRPB) relate to quality of life: “It is suggested that SRPB should be more routinely addressed in assessment of QoL, as it can make a substantial difference.
  - WHOQOL SRPB Group 2006
- Spiritual Care → Palliative Care: "Integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;"
  - WHO definition of palliative care 2011
- Feb 2018: New WHO guideline on intrapartum care
  - Growing medicalization of the process: “…not only the clinical requirements for a safe labour and childbirth but also meet the psychological and emotional needs of women.”
  - WHO 2018

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF MIDWIVES

- “‘Midwifery care is holistic in nature, grounded in an understanding of the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, psychological and physical experiences of women…””
  - ICM 2007
MATERNITY CARE

- Existential and spiritual aspects of the childbirth period remain in the periphery of prevailing care
- Hospital is the most religious place in the city
- New initiatives emerging from the Danish national church and private market related to motherhood and childbirth
- First professor in Spiritual Care in Denmark – although with a focus on cancer
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- Rise in literature on existential and spiritual aspects of childbirth and midwifery
- … reflects the very essence of what it is to be human…

CHARACTERISTICS

- Beginning of life – expectations different from end of life
- Maternity Service – hospital
- Time constraints – contacts lasting on average 15-20 minutes in prenatal care
- No life-continuing contact (as GPs)
- 1/3 of midwives leaves maternity ward
MOTHERHOOD TRANSITION THROUGH AN EXISTENTIAL LENS

NEW STUDIES

Soulful childbirth - upgrading communication on existential matters in Danish Maternity Care Services. An action-based research project developing a blended-learning postgraduate course.

Resonance between beginning of life and end of life – an untrodden path to health in Maternity Services? A comparative study of two PhD studies researching birth and death respectively.

Pastoral care in maternity services – also if everything seem right. Introducing pastoral care sessions in maternity care.

The Buddy Study – a peer support programme after adverse events.

Does fatherhood change the meaning in life for first-time fathers? A qualitative study using the “Sources of Meaning Card Method” focusing on existential perspectives in fatherhood.

Being a newly qualified midwife... an interpretative phenomenological study focusing on transition from student to professional. Meaningfulness seem important.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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MOTHERHOOD TRANSITION THROUGH AN EXISTENTIAL LENS

Nationwide survey among first-time mothers (FT or PT) 2011 (n=913)

- Existential meaning among first-time mothers (2014)
- Prayer and Meditation among first-time mothers (2016)
- The moment of birth through an existential lens in secular society (2018 – in submission)