



Advanced midwifery practice: An evolutionary concept analysis

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ABSTRACT

Aim: the concept of 'advanced midwifery practice' is explored to a limited extent in the international literature. However, a clear conception of advanced midwifery practice is vital to advance the discipline and to achieve both internal and external legitimacy. This concept analysis aims to clarify advanced midwifery practice and identify its components.

Methods: a review of the literature was executed using Rodgers' evolutionary method of concept analysis to analyze the attributes, references, related terms, antecedents and consequences of advanced midwifery practice.

Results: an international consensus definition of advanced midwifery practice is currently lacking. Four major attributes of advanced midwife practitioners (AMPs) are identified: autonomy in practice, leadership, expertise, and research skills. A consensus was found on the need of preparation at master's level for AMPs. Such midwives have a broad and internationally varied scope of practice, fulfilling different roles such as clinicians, clinical and professional leaders, educators, consultants, managers, change agents, researchers, and auditors. Evidence illustrating the important part AMPs play on a clinical and strategic level is mounting.

Key conclusions: the findings of this concept analysis support a wide variety in the emergence, titles, roles, and scope of practice of AMPs. Research on clinical and strategic outcomes of care provided by AMPs supports further implementation of these roles. As the indistinctness of AMPs' titles and roles is one of the barriers for implementation, a clear conceptualization of advanced midwifery practice seems essential for successful implementation.

Implications for practice: an international debate and consensus on the defining elements of advanced midwifery practice could enhance the further development of midwifery as a profession and is a pre-requisite for its successful implementation. Due to rising numbers of AMPs, extension of practice and elevated quality requirements in healthcare, more outcomes research exclusively evaluating the contribution of AMPs to healthcare becomes possible and desirable.

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Introduction

Advanced practice is a term used in several healthcare disciplines to distinguish a practice level from basic practice through specialization and expansion of knowledge, skills, and role autonomy (Bryant-Lukosius et al., 2004; Broome, 2015; Steer et al., 2015). Although the term 'Advanced Practice Nursing' (APN) first appeared in the nursing literature in the 1980s, there still remains confusion about its definition (Ruel and Motyka, 2009). Several concept analyses (CA) have tried to clarify the concept of APN (Dowling et al., 2013). APN is frequently defined as 'a level of nursing practice that utilizes extended and expanded skills, experience and knowledge in assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation of the care required' (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2009). Four major roles are defined by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing as 'advanced nursing roles': nurse practitioners (NP), clinical nurse specialists (CNS), certified nurse midwives (CNM), and certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA) (Ruel and Motyka, 2009).

Compared to APN, advanced midwifery practice is explored to a lesser extent. With the exception of CNMs, advanced midwifery practice is a more recent development in midwifery. New or expanded roles of midwives are seen as essential for the contribution to high quality healthcare and for the development of the profession (Begley et al., 2007). However, advanced midwifery practice seems to be a controversial notion in midwifery and the necessity and desirability of advanced midwife practitioners (AMPs) have been questioned. Arguments used in this discussion are: creating advanced levels of practice could generate a midwifery 'elite' (Lewis 2000; Lessing-Turner, 2001); all qualified midwives function at an advanced level of practice if they practice autonomously and to the full scope of their practice (Smith et al., 2010).

When advanced midwifery practice is developed further, a clear conception is vital to advance the discipline (Ruel and Motyka, 2009). Concepts are an essential structural component of theory development. They make an important contribution to the expansion and development of midwifery knowledge through the enhancement of the theoretical foundation of research and practice (Larkin et al., 2009). Clear concepts are also important to avoid discordance within the midwifery profession (Ruel and Motyka 2009) and for the achievement of external legitimacy (Hanson and Hamric 2003). Similar to the concept of APN, advanced midwifery practice needs to be clearly defined to gain understanding and

further acceptance of AMPs by society and other healthcare professions (Silva and Sorrell, 1992). Clarification of the advanced midwifery practice concept can prevent misguided interpretations regarding the purpose of AMPs and facilitate the implementation of advanced midwifery practice (Bryant-Lukosius et al., 2004).

As a clear definition and meaning of the concept is lacking on an international level, this CA aims to clarify what is currently known as advanced midwifery practice. The analysis identifies the components of advanced midwifery practice and serves as a base for further development.

Methods

For this CA a review of the literature was executed and Rodgers evolutionary method of concept analysis was used. This method was chosen because of the emphasis on the fact that a concept is context dependent and dynamic. In the evolutionary view, the content of a concept is not composed of a fixed set of conditions constituting an everlasting 'truth' of the concept. On the contrary, a concept is considered as a basis for further development as it evolves over time by convention or purposeful redefinition. This CA method was also chosen for its focus on the collection and analysis of raw data rather than the construction of 'cases' as is proposed in other CA approaches (Rodgers, 1989).

Search strategy

A search strategy was drafted by one reviewer with training in midwifery and systematic literature review methodology (RG). After discussion with a second reviewer with expertise in systematic reviews and APN (AVH), a final search strategy for all databases was agreed upon by both reviewers. The literature search was performed by one author (RG). The key search concepts were 'advanced practice', 'advanced practitioner titles' and 'midwifery'. Related terms, synonyms and abbreviations of these key search concepts were used in the search strategy and combined with one of the Boolean operators 'OR' and 'AND'. A detailed search strategy used for searching publications in Pubmed is displayed in Table 1. Publications were searched in the following databases: Pubmed, Web of Science, CINAHL, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library, and Invert. The Pubmed search strategy was modified accordingly to search the other databases. The databases

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