



Developing a work/study programme for midwifery education in East Africa



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ABSTRACT

Background: there is extensive evidence to show that skilled midwifery care is crucial in reducing maternal deaths; however, in East Africa, the midwifery profession has been subsumed within the nursing role. This paper highlights issues in the preparation of skilled midwives in three East African countries, specifically, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania and provides a case study description of a flexible work/study programme designed to develop skilled midwives to meet internationally regarded ICM competency standards in midwifery education and practice.

The model: a flexible, competency-based Bachelor's of Science in Midwifery programme (BScM) has been developed based on fifteen years' experience of running a Bachelor of Science in nursing programme. The new BScM programme allows licensed diploma midwives the opportunity to study for two days a week towards a bachelor's degree in midwifery, whilst continuing to work and support their families. The model also provides education at degree level thus providing a sound platform for ongoing development of a cadre of midwifery leaders.

Conclusion: the BScM education model for working midwives builds on the success of the BScN work/study model in developing strong leadership, clinical and critical thinking competencies. The newly developed midwifery programme provides a pathway by which to increase the availability of skilled East African midwives educated to the Global Standards for Midwifery Education.

Background

Extensive evidence exists to show that skilled midwifery care is crucial in reducing maternal deaths (Campbell and Graham, 2006; Family Care International, 2014; Renfrew et al., 2014; The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, 2011; UNFPA, 2014). In East Africa, however, the Midwifery profession has been subsumed within the nursing role. Frequently midwives are prepared for midwifery practice in combined nursing and midwifery programmes with insufficient time allocation to develop the full range of competencies needed for skilled and safe midwifery practice. This paper describes current issues in the preparation of skilled midwives in three East African countries, specifically, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania and provides a case study description of a flexible work/study programme designed to develop skilled midwives to meet the internationally regarded

International Confederation of Midwives Global Standards for Midwifery Education (ICM, 2010a, 2010b). Over half of all globally reported maternal deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Estimates suggest that in 2015, approximately 303,000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth. Almost all of these deaths occurred in low-resource settings, and most of these deaths could have been prevented by access to improved quality of MCH care (Alkema et al., 2016; WHO, 2016a). One of the main challenges in providing quality midwifery care in East Africa is a lack of clearly defined midwifery standards and clear educational pathways to develop competent, educated midwives who can practice safely, lead the profession and influence the outcomes of midwifery care. The State of the World's Midwifery (UNFPA, 2014) has demonstrated that Midwives, who are educated and regulated to international standards, are competent to deliver 87% of the maternity needs of women in their care. [ten Hoop-](#)

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Table 1
Cadres of Nursing and Midwifery in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Programme	International Nomenclature	Programme duration (in Years)	Meet ICM standards?	Licence to practice
Enrolled Nurse	Certificate nurse	2 ½	No	Licensed Nurse conducts emergency deliveries
Enrolled Midwife	Certificate midwife	2 ½	No	Licensed Midwife
Enrolled Comprehensive Nurse	Certificate comprehensive nurse	2 ½	No	Licensed Nurse conducts emergency deliveries
Registered Nurse (direct)	Diploma Nurse	3	No	Licensed Nurse conducts emergency deliveries
Registered Nurse (Upgrading)	Diploma nurse	1 ½	No	Licensed Nurse conducts emergency deliveries
Registered Midwife (direct)	Diploma midwife	3	No	Licensed Midwife
Registered Midwife (extension/upgrading)	Diploma midwife	1 ½	No	Licensed Midwife
Registered Comprehensive Nurse (direct)	Diploma comprehensive nurse	3	No	Licensed Nurse conducts deliveries
Registered Comprehensive Nurse extension/upgrading)	Diploma comprehensive nurse	1 ½	No	Licensed Nurse conducts deliveries
Bachelors Midwife (upgrading)	Bachelors midwife	2 ½	Yes	Licensed Midwife
Bachelors Nurse (upgrading)	Bachelors midwife	2 ½	No	Licensed Nurse conducts emergency deliveries

Bender et al., (2014) assert that well educated and supported midwives who possess the necessary maternal and neonatal competencies are best placed to be the driving force behind improving the quality of care for women and their babies echo this.

Despite extensive efforts and recommendations to harmonise nursing and midwifery education across East Africa there is little evidence of harmonisation in practice (Nabirye et al., 2015). For example, Uganda currently has fifteen different cadres of nurses and midwives eligible for licencing and over 80 private and public institutions offering programmes with midwifery related content. Of these, five cadres are eligible to provide midwifery care. In Kenya, there are seven different cadres of licensed midwives; in Tanzania, there are four. Many of these cadres allow licencing as a nurse and a midwife, with varying degrees of in-house training midwifery theory and practice. Most education programmes involve a two and a half year certificate course leading to qualification as either an enrolled nurse, an enrolled midwife or an enrolled comprehensive nurse, all of which licence the practitioner as a nurse and midwife. (Uganda Nursing and Midwifery Council; Tanzania Nursing and Midwifery Council; Nursing Council of Kenya). Table 1 provides insight to the range of programmes currently offered. A review of the curricula for each course indicated that none of the programmes meet the minimum Global Standards for Midwifery Education recommended by the recommended by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), whose standards for education leading to midwifery licensure include a minimum of three years' full time study with no less than 40% theory and 50% practice (ICM 2010a, 2010b). Currently there are no midwifery educational standards or professional development requirements in place across East Africa. Following initial licensure, nurses and midwives can immediately establish private practice, with little or no regulatory oversight. This newly developed flexible two-day study programme is benchmarked against the recommendations laid down by Global Standards for Midwifery Education and aims to develop evidenced based midwifery leaders and clinical experts who are educated to bachelor's level,

The model and curriculum

The High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth report (WHO 2016b) includes a key recommendation to ensure that all health worker education is of the highest quality that matches the health needs of populations and ensures that health workers can work to their full potential. Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Midwifery in East Africa is a not for profit university committed to supporting Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and the East Africa region in its effort to ensure the provision of quality maternal child health services that are responsive to the needs of women and the community. Part of this commitment gives registered midwives the opportunity to work towards a bachelor's degree in midwifery, whilst continuing to work and support their families. The first flexible work/study programme was a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) offered for Ugandan nurses in 2000 and rolled out to Kenya and Tanzania in 2001. The programme has successfully graduated 2186 students and of these, a formal impact evaluation has found that the majority of graduates achieve promotion within two years of graduation and to date over 100 are currently employed in senior leadership positions within the East African nursing and health professional workforce. (Brownie et al., 2016).

The BScM work-study programme spans two and a half years, comprising of five 18-week semesters. The benefit of a degree level qualification is that it provides a platform for later career progression including a strong pathway for emerging midwifery leaders to progress to clinical, education, policy and/or research leadership roles. Content includes midwifery related and supporting courses - both theoretical and practical delivered via a unique blend of face-to-face and blended learning approaches for theory and practice. Students attend face-to-face classes two days per week. The Global Standards for Midwifery

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