



Editorial



A selective, reflective, history of this journal

This is my final editorial for *Women and Birth* after 13 years as editor of the journal of the Australian College of Midwives (ACM). In preparing this paper I have re-read my editorials and will draw on what I wrote then to inform what I write now. My role as Editor began during a time of great change for Australian midwifery. I will summarise these key changes as a way of contextualising the development of the journal. Next, I will outline the early problems besetting the journal before discussing the strategies we used to raise the quality and significance of papers submitted and published. I will then discuss how we changed the name of the journal to *Women and Birth*. At the same time, we changed from a local, paper-only publisher to an international publishing house; Elsevier. The effect of this change has been immense in terms of marketing the journal and its online dissemination across the world.

The Australian context

The way that the journal has changed over the years originates in the ground-breaking work of the Australian Midwifery Action Project (AMAP) in the late 1990 and early 2000s.¹ The work of AMAP was pivotal in midwifery beginning to separate itself from nursing. A key milestone along the way to midwifery's separation was the establishment of the ACM's Bachelor of Midwifery (BMid) Taskforce (see image 1). The history of this group has been well described by Leap et al.² and Pincombe et al.³ In the 1990s and early 2000s, most Australians did not know what a midwife was. I think that much of the development of midwifery as a profession – and our warm acceptance by the public – had to do with the early pioneers in South Australia, the members of BMid Taskforce, and the visionary leadership of Pat Brodie as President of the College and Barb Vernon as CEO.

Image 1: The Inaugural Bachelor of Midwifery Education Task Force



I became an enthusiastic member of the inaugural BMid taskforce which met in Canberra twice in 2000.² Between meetings, members of the taskforce worked on drafts of standards that would eventually become the accreditation standards for a midwifery education programmes in Australia. The way that we used feminist group processes within the taskforce was skilfully led by Nicky Leap, the Project Coordinator. She guided us to use woman-centred language and claim the word ‘midwife’ for ourselves. I remember she once said, “take every opportunity to tell members of the public you are a midwife and have the conversation about what that means”. I did just that. I think we all did, and I think we took that message to our colleagues and students as well. When we discussed midwifery in a woman-centred way in the BMid taskforce it re-enforced my own, newly acquired, understanding of what it means to be a midwife.

My passion for woman-centred care and midwifery as a discipline is in harmony with the ACM Philosophy of Midwifery⁴ and is reflected in what I have done as Editor. My epiphany about midwifery occurred when I worked with young marginalised childbearing women using a feminist praxis approach.⁵ It was during my PhD experiences, based within a women’s community centre, that I realised I had to divest myself of the things I had valued as a nurse: ‘nursing theory’, the ‘nursing process’, ‘nursing diagnosis’ and the nurse/patient relationship. I developed a critical understanding of the role of the midwife as facilitating the empowerment of the woman – rather than being a cog in the obstetric machinery that dominates childbearing women and midwives in hospitals. This understanding is most clearly reflected in several articles I wrote or co-authored.^{6–10}

Early problems

With awareness of the problems of *The Australian Midwifery Journal*, I somewhat reluctantly took on the role as the Editor at the beginning of 2005. At that time the copies of the paper journal were mailed to ACM members and sold to academic libraries, almost exclusively in Australia. The cost of publishing the journal was a significant drain on the ACM funds. Circulation of the journal was, of course, very low – which was reflected in low citation rates for the published papers. When we started in 2005, Caroline Homer, as Deputy Editor, and I struggled to find papers to publish. Much of the early editing work resembled being a PhD supervisor; the editors and reviewers helped authors to extensively re-draft their papers to bring them up to publishable standard. This work was laborious. It resulted in only four slim issues of the journal (120 pages) being published in 2005 and 2006. This caused delays with the publication of the first issue. We realised that one of the main problems with submitted papers was the poor standard of academic writing. Together, Caroline and I formulated a plan to raise the quality and status of the journal. We co-wrote about this in our first Editorial.¹¹ Our goals were to improve the quality and quantity of papers submitted and the number and quality of reviewers. We saw how development of quality criteria for evaluating the rigor of papers would be an important guide for authors and reviewers that enabled them to raise their own standards. Meanwhile I also set about learning the finer points of academic writing skills.

Raising quality standards

Focussing on raising the standards of papers submitted, I wrote and published two related articles on writing for publication.^{12,13} These articles have continued to be the basis for the ‘Writing for Publication’ workshops that I, the Deputy Editor, and/or Associate Editor present at the annual ACM

national conference. Concurrently, I worked to develop a set of evidence-informed quality criteria for evaluating papers. I felt confident in qualitative methods because in my PhD I had used sociological, post-structural feminist praxis methodology. This had required that I immerse myself in the qualitative research literature. I critically reviewed the international methodological literature on appraising qualitative and quantitative research. In my literature review I found that the standards for reporting quantitative research were clear and largely uncontested.¹⁴ For the qualitative criteria I relied largely upon the criteria of the *Joanna Briggs Institute* and the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods and Qualitative Health Research*.¹⁴

I completed a retrospective analysis of the research papers published in our journal for the years 2002–2004. The results of my analysis showed that most research papers published in our journal were of low-medium quality. This set of quality review criteria were read and critiqued by Caroline Homer. These adapted criteria were then used, and continue to be used, as the quality checklist which are available for use by authors and *Women and Birth* reviewers. The review criteria are available in our Guide for Authors (look under preparation > review criteria).¹⁵ Interestingly, in that retrospective analysis paper I wrote “we (midwives) are developing as researchers but largely in ways that are individualistic, unplanned and uncoordinated”¹⁴ (p.14). I argued that midwifery research, if it was to attract funding and create evidence for practice, must be “team-based, multi-site and programmatic”¹⁴ (p.14). It is so heartening to see that there is now much Australian Midwifery research of this type and it is changing practice.

Becoming an international journal: the process

To become an international journal we needed an international publishing company. The President and CEO of ACM, along with Caroline and myself, began talking to Sally Stone, an Elsevier publisher. We all recognised that we were never going to be able to achieve our goals for the journal with a readership that was limited to an audience of Australian midwives. It was clear that the journal needed to be made available online to increase the number of readers. Being internationally available would increase citations and encourage more papers to our journal. In July 2005, Caroline Homer and I recommended to the National Executive of ACM, that we should change publishers to Elsevier, take on a woman-centred title and use a new cover design. At that Executive meeting our recommendations were supported. There was no dissent about the beauty of our new cover which subtly signifies a woman who is pregnant. There was, however, some dissent about other aspects of our recommended changes.

In September 2005, I wrote an editorial about the changes.¹⁶ In that paper I addressed the concerns raised by some members of the Executive which were (1) fear that using the word ‘birth’ in the title would narrow the appeal of the journal to only those midwives who worked with women in labour; (2) concern about leaving the word ‘midwifery’ out of the main title and; (3) concern about removing the word ‘Australian’ from the main title. In relation to (1) using the word ‘birth’ in the title, I wrote in that September 2005 editorial ‘the Aims and Scope for the Journal have been revised to explicitly remove any such concerns’¹⁶ (p.5). The aims and scope of the journal begins “Women and Birth is a midwifery journal that publishes on all matters that affect women and birth, from pre-conceptual counselling, through pregnancy, birth, and the first six weeks postnatal”. The whole aims and scope are available at: [http://www.womenandbirth.org/article/S1871-5192\(18\)30101-X/pdf](http://www.womenandbirth.org/article/S1871-5192(18)30101-X/pdf).

In addressing the other concerns raised by some members of the ACM executive, I wrote in that same editorial: “the rationale

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