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Honoring Motherhood: The Path to Respectful Maternity Care

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Abstract

Maternity care is essential for ensuring the health and well-being of both mothers and babies. It encompasses a range of services, from prenatal care to postnatal support, aiming to provide comprehensive care throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum period. It's crucial to respect the autonomy, dignity and choices of expectant mothers while providing them with the highest standard of care and support. The world health organization (WHO) is working on strategies to promote respectful maternity care by focusing on treating pregnant women and mothers with dignity, kindness, and respect during all stages of childbirth. They emphasize the importance of providing women with information, involving them in decision-making, and ensuring their privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, WHO promotes training healthcare providers to deliver compassionate and culturally sensitive care, as well as advocating for policies that support respectful maternity care globally. Challenges in implementing respectful maternity care includes Infrastructure, Physical Resources and Commodities, Nursing Professionals, Knowledge and Skill Development etc.

Keywords: RMC, TNAI, White Ribbon Alliance

Introduction

In every country and community worldwide, pregnancy and childbirth are momentous events in the lives of women and families and represent a time of intense vulnerability. The concept of "safe motherhood" is usually restricted to physical safety, but childbearing is also an important rite of passage, with deep personal and cultural significance for a woman and her family.

- **Respectful Maternity Care:** "Respectful maternity care-which refers to care organized for and provided to all women in a manner that maintains their dignity, privacy, and confidentiality, ensures freedom from harm and mistreatment, and enables informed choice and continuous support during labour and childbirth." (WHO recommendation on respectful maternity care 15 February 2018)
- **Universal Rights of Childbearing Women:** Human rights are fundamentals entitlements due to all people as per the international declarations and conventions. All these rights are based on Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Bioethics and Human Rights (1997). Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women (1994) and a report of the office of the United Nations high commissioner for human rights on preventable maternal mortality, morbidity and human rights (4th World Conference on Women Begging)

Articles-I

Every Women has the Right to be Free from Harm and Ill Treatment: All physical contact with pregnant women should be gentle, comforting and reassuring. NO WOMEN SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY ABUSE.

Examples of physical abuse during childbirth includes:-

- Pinching women during labour process.
- Being slapped.
- Sexual assault and abuse.

Articles-II

Every Women Health Right to Information, Informed Consent and Refusal, Respect for Choices and Preferences, Including the Right to Her Choice of Companionship during Maternity Care Whenever Possible: All patients need a careful explanation in language at understanding of their levels educational and cultural background. No one can force patients to do without their knowledge.

Examples of non-consented care include:

- Nurses not giving women the proper information about medical procedures.
- Nurses not asking women's permission to conduct medical procedures such as:
 - Caesarean sections
 - Episiotomies

Articles-III

Every Woman has the Right to Privacy and Confidentiality: Nurses are required to take all actions to protect the privacy and confidentiality of information of women under their care.

Example of right to privacy and confidentiality include:-

- Having labour or delivery in view of others (not using such as curtains)
- Exposing unrequired body parts of women.
- Sharing sensitive information such as HIV status, medical history with other people or by high voice informing relatives.

Article-IV

Every Woman has the Right to be treated with Dignity and Respect: Nurses cannot humiliate or verbally abuse women. Nurses must ensure that the patients are as comfortable as possible during all procedures.

Examples of patient's dignity and respect are:-

- Nurses ensure that women under care are kept comfortable during all procedure.
- Every woman is required to treat by respecting their values.
- Nurses must encourage and women to freely express their views and feedback on care during stay in hospital.

Article-V

Every Women has the Right to Equality, Freedom from Discrimination and Equitable Care all Women are Equal and Must be Treated with Discrimination:-

Examples:-Article V includes:

- Nurses do not discriminate women for race, ethnicity, age, language, HIV status, traditional belief, economical status and educational background under their care in the state of pregnancy, childbirth or postnatal.
- Equal care is considered for all women under care.

Articles VI:

Every Women has the Right to Healthcare and to the Highest Attainable Level of Health all Women cannot be Deficit from Receiving Attainable Care.

Examples of this article are following:-

- Leaving women alone during labour process and no medical attention is given.
- Women trying to give birth alone or assisted by relatives or other patient or aids instead of qualified duty nurse

Article VII

Every Women has the Right to Liberty, Autonomy, Self-Determination and Freedom from Coercion

Many health facilities are known to detain women and babies to leave hospital/health setting.

Examples: very common examples are:

- Not allowing women and babies to leave hospital due to non-payments of bills.
- Even when women's baby died/still birth or women died during treatment, health care setting authorities do not allow to leave hospital because they could not pay their bills.
- Lack of balanced information to push a woman for caesarean section.
- Changing birth plan without the consent of women or relatives.

Brief of Disrespectful Care and Abuse

Examples of disrespectful care and abuse are cited as:

- Poor or absent of communication with the women.
- Failure to introduce oneself as a caregiver.
- Not addressing women by name, just calling "woman", "bed no." or "patient" etc.
- Giving little attention or long waiting to women or family members.
- Overcharging for health facility.
- Lack of privacy
- Performing harmful practices.
- Lack of informed consent.
- Denying choice of position for birth.
- Verbal abuse: insulting, intimidation, threats, coercion.
- No choice comparison.

Challenges in Implementation of Respectful Maternity Care

These factors are the challenges implementation of respectful maternity care in maternal health care settings. Survey done by TNAI also suggested the following challenges for RMC:-

i). Policy

- Regulations and legal frameworks for health rights are lacking and improper.
- Existence and information regarding respectful maternity care nurses do not follow the

ii). Infrastructure, Physical Resources and Commodities

- Many maternal health care settings are lacking in adequate infrastructure such as physical space, safe and secured environment.
- Non-sufficient supplies and equipment is a big challenge in maintaining RMC by nursing professionals.

iii). Nursing Professionals

- Inadequate nursing staffs and other works with work overload and no appreciation lead to high stress and frustration among nurses.
- If nursing professionals are less paid the standard of care affected.

iv). Knowledge And Practice of Nursing Professionals

- Lack of current practices and standard of midwifery care. Out-dated practices followed by no evidences.
- Resistance to change the practices.
- Limited understanding of birth process.

Strategies in Promotion of Respectful Maternity Care

Promotion of respectful maternity care involves various strategies, including:

- Advocacy:** Advocacy programme on respectful maternity care to be organise during induction in service training for each maternity nurse on their joining.
- Law, Policies and Protocols:** Establishment of policies and guidelines to support respectful maternity care as well as rules, regulations that discourages disrespectful maternal care needs to be developed and notified by the authority of government of India.
- Education and Training:** RMC as separate topic require to be included in basic nursing syllabus such as general nursing and midwifery (GNM), B.Sc. Nursing, ANM, as well as it can be revised in post graduate nursing programmes.

- iv). Research, Monitoring and Evaluation:** Nurses are involved in monitoring of RMC protocol care as to find out fact and evidence of disrespectful maternity care. Monitoring and evaluation report need to discuss with nurses working in maternity care settings.
- v). Develop Communication Skills**
- Introduce of yourself and greet the patient.
 - Listen attentively.
 - Maintain eye contact.
 - Use appropriate body language and gesture like smiling, nodding.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges and complexity of this subject, nurses around the world are interested in promoting RMC. Strategies are needed to implement and address these issues. Disrespectful maternity care is to be treated as an urgent problem of community. Concern and need special attention.

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