

EDITORIAL

Hi all!!

So it has been quite some time since I have sat in front of my computer and wracked my brains about what to write for our newsletter. As you may all know, four months ago I gave birth to a baby girl – **Maya** – so am now a full time mum. I must say it's hectic, but one of the most rewarding experiences. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the midwives, nurses and MMDNA for their great support and expert advice given to me at such a crucial stage in our life.

Maya



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MARKED DECLINE IN EUROPEAN BIRTH RATE: A CONCERN FOR MIDWIVES

Penny Held, who is the European representative on the International Midwifery Editorial Advisory Group, in the last issue, wrote about the demographic changes in this region that will impact on midwifery and what needs to be done.

Demographic changes:

- The average fertility rate in Europe dropped to **1.45**

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Useful Internet Sites

www.ncwmalta.com

This is the website of the National Council of women

www.britishjournalofmidwifery.com

This is the leading clinical peer-reviewed journal for midwives which is now more than ever, the choice of the profession

www.midirs.org

This definitive midwifery information service

www.acnm.org

The American college of Nurses-Midwives. "With women for a lifetime"

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Win a weekend break for two when you renew your membership !!

The Association is offering a weekend break for two at the Golden Tulip Vivaldi Hotel, St. Julians to one of the regular paid-up midwife members of the association. So make sure your 2004 membership fee is settled to enter this draw by the 26th of October 2004. The winner will be announced in the next issue of In Touch.

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Back to business ... Summer has come to an end and we are at the start of a new academic year. Good luck to all those who are continuing their education and have got themselves signed up to follow a course.

Once again I would like to encourage you all to contribute towards this newsletter. Surely each one of us has something new to share with our colleagues. We have also been invited by the Sunday Maltese paper, *Il-Mument*, to write a monthly article on *Is-Saħħa Tal-Mara* throughout her life span. So please write about 600 words on an aspect of women's health and send it to us to be published in your name. We have a list of topics that need to be dealt with so before writing, contact us to choose your topic. As we have always said before, you may either e-mail us at midwives_in_touch@hotmail.com or hand in your article on diskette to one of the council members.

Alexia



Ms. A. Formosa, midwife, delivering her paper on Choice, control and decision making in Labour



The Panel from right to left: Ms. R. Borg Xuereb, President Midwives' Association, Ms. H. Borg, Lactation Midwife and Ms. M. Cutajar, Vice President MUMN.

The International Day Of the Midwife

The Midwives' Association has always celebrated the International Day of the Midwife on the Sunday nearest to the 5th May of each year. Midwives look forward to this day, which is celebrated together with relatives and friends. In previous years we did an educational activity, participated in a thanks giving mass by the Association's Chaplain and ended with lunch.

This year we wanted to have more involvement of the general public, especially of women of child bearing age especially since the theme for this year was "**Midwives – A voice for healthy families.**" To promote this day, we participated in "phone in" radio programmes and contacted a number of people to pass on the word on this day.

For the first time this year, the Midwives' Association celebrated the day together with the MUMN by a seminar, which was held at the Golden Tulip, Vivaldi Hotel in St. Julians. We kept the theme proposed by the ICM for this day ie. "**Midwives – A voice for healthy families**"

The turnout of professionals and public was very encouraging, the public making up 13% of all participants.

The Hon. Helen D'Amato opened the seminar. She highlighted the good outcomes of maternity care in Malta and pointed out areas where change and improvement were required. The Director Nursing Services and the CEO for Gender Equality also addressed the seminar. A number of papers were presented by practicing midwives and all emphasised the importance of empowering midwives, mothers and families.

The President of the association presented a paper on **The Midwife with the Family**. The papers were followed by statements and questions from the floor. Ms. M. Abela, secretary of the Midwives' Association closed the seminar by asking all present to work together to reduce the medicalisation of maternity care and thus help in humanising childbirth in Malta.

At the conclusion of the seminar, it was agreed that a working group made up of professionals was to be set up to work on establishing the way forward for midwifery care in Malta. Those professionals interested in joining the group were asked to sign up and a good number did so.

MIDWIFERY EDUCATION IN MALTA

(By Mary Vella Bondin)

Historical Aspect

There does not seem to have been any formal teaching of midwives before the 17th century in Malta and it must be presumed that the guild method of training was in force. The Ecclesiastical authorities through the Parish Priest were enjoined to teach and examine midwives on the proper administration of Baptism.

In 1802 Dr. F. Buttigieg was appointed Teacher of Obstetrics at the Women's Hospital at Valletta to deliver lectures to medical students and also to hold a separate class for midwives, who were taught in Maltese as they did not have a good grasp of Italian. This teaching to midwives had to be abolished in later years with a consequent deterioration in the practice of midwifery.

New efforts were made to organise a school of Practical Midwifery in 1868. It was contemplated that a more respectable type of students will be selected, and that there will be the teaching of theory and practice of midwifery following which the candidates were to sit for a qualifying examination. The low educational and social status of the applicant remained a problem. (Malta Government Gazette supplement, 26 June 1915, P. 54)

The school of midwifery functioned very erratically and was abolished in later years with a consequent deterioration in the practice of midwifery. As a result, competent midwives were rapidly diminishing and ignorant women were assuming their duties to the serious detriment of the poor population. This state of affairs was ascribed to the abolition of the school of midwifery and it was thus recommended to re-establish the school and to enact legal measures to allow only qualified and certified midwives to practice.

The school was finally placed on a sound footing in 1915 when the course of midwifery was instituted under the auspices of the University of Malta, leading to Diploma of Midwifery. The School of Midwifery reverted to the Medical and Health Department in 1946 with the first group under this scheme qualifying in 1949. The Professor of Midwifery was in charge of the studies that lasted two years and eventually three years.

Since no Gozitan candidates attended the course of midwifery held in Malta, and Maltese midwives did not find it worthwhile to work in Gozo, the number of midwives on the sister island had dwindled down to almost vanishing point. To improve the situation in Gozo, the Department of Health had to offer a special allowance, above the established salary given to midwives from Malta. In a further effort to increase the number of Gozitan midwives, a course for midwives was started in October 1937 at the Victoria General Hospital in Gozo. The final examination of this course was held in July 1940.

By 1958 the midwives were fully qualified to render the best service. Midwifery students were accepted after a minimum of three years of secondary education and having reached the minimum age of 21 years. The students received a training allowance throughout the three years of training in the hospital and in the community. To qualify as midwives, the students had to undergo written, oral and practical examinations. With these changes, the midwives had a better comprehension of the role they played and were more capable of recognising the first signs of disease or complications in the women they were looking after.

The number of applicants remained low and only five applicants turned up for the course starting in 1958 with only one finishing successfully in 1961.

This resulted in a decline in facilities for Midwifery Training locally and Registered nurses wishing to pursue midwifery training had to do so in the United Kingdom.

Establishing Midwifery Training

The need for the Training of Midwives in Malta had long been felt and Prof. A. P. Camilleri was amongst the first to draw attention to the pressing need of setting up a school for midwives. As head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department and in collaboration with the Chief Government Medical Officer at the Department of Health, it was agreed to organise a Refresher Course for certified midwives. This course was to be approved by the Central Midwives Board for England and Wales for the purpose of GI of the Rules which stipulated that midwives had to do a refresher course every 5 years. A representative from the Central Midwives Board, Miss M. E. Turner, who was also an Educational Supervisor of Midwives, was present during the course. Besides coming to lecture and represent the Board, she had also to assess the possibility of setting up a school for the training of Midwives which would have some degree of reciprocity with the Central Midwives Board for England and Wales.

This Refresher Course for Registered Midwives was organised by the Royal University of Malta, Department of Obstetrics during May 1969. Prof. A. P. Camilleri delivered the inaugural address. He stated that the Refresher Course was especially important since it was the first of its kind in Malta. The group of midwives attending were eight in number, five of whom were Maltese, two English and one West Indian.

They were all practicing registered midwives working in the different branches of Midwifery in Malta. They were from:

- St. Luke's Hospital Obstetric Unit
- The Blue Sisters Maternity Unit
- St. Catherine's Hospital Midwifery Unit
- The Malta Memorial District Nursing Association

Miss M. E. Turner had her stay extended by a few days during which time she visited the different Midwifery Units on the Island including that of Gozo and spoke to the practicing midwives. She presented a report of her findings, which to a

greater extent was considered favourable.

Following the Refresher Course in 1969, the ball started rolling to establish midwifery education in Malta. For this reason and with the direction of the Head of Obstetrics and of the Central Midwives Board in UK, a Midwife Teacher was acquired.

Miss E. Thomson from Wimbledon was selected to come to Malta and her stay was to be sponsored by the UK's Ministry of Overseas Development. She arrived in February 1970 and was allocated an office at the School for Nurses. She had a lot of work to do regarding the formulation of curricula, rules and regulations, practice required and contacts to be made.

After almost nine months of her stay in Malta, the first call for applicants for midwifery students from amongst Registered General Nurses was issued by the Department of Health. Following a selection interview, the first course of six students was inaugurated. At this time it was stipulated that each course will take a maximum of six students and that the course will not commence with less than three students. The course was of one calendar year duration. The first course commenced in October 1970 and after a year all the six students qualified as midwives.

There was supposed to be a course every six months but this was difficult to achieve due to the shortage of Registered General Nurses and to the fact that the role of the midwife was not as yet exactly known by those in authority. Somehow midwifery training continued and the need to train a Maltese Midwife Teacher was felt and was becoming very urgent.

*(to be continued
in the next issue)*



- European population growth reached a turning point in 2000 with the number of children dropping to a level that statistically assured that there will be fewer parents in the next generation than there are in the current one.
- With the current trends, by the year 2100, the European population is expected to drop by 88 million people with the possibility that some Eastern European countries could be wiped out by the year 2050.

Factors contributing to the low birth rate:

- Having the first child at an older age.
- Women opting for a career.
- Work pressures.
- Higher rate of relationship breakdown.
- The raise of individualism and materialism.

Issues for midwives to work on:

- To be active on the political level so that family-friendly politics become a reality and women and their families get the support they need.
- To ensure that women are informed about the laws which protect them when they are pregnant.
- To inform women about their rights and benefits during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- To emphasise the significant role of midwives in protecting birth: **midwives should be seen as advocates of normal childbirth.**
- Midwives need to inform women that it is misleading to assume that medicalised care in normal childbirth is optimal.
- To re-establish birth as a normal physiological process in the public consciousness.

As Dr. Beate Schucking said, in her keynote speech at the 26th ICM Congress in Vienna in 2002, we midwives need to work to take **normal birth off the list of endangered species.**

Reference

Held P. (2004) Marked decline in European birth rate: a concern for midwives. *International Midwifery*, 4 (17), July/August 2004, p.39.

M. Abela
Secretary

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN-NCW

40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

The 22 September – 26 September 2004 marked the 40th Anniversary Celebrations of the National Council of Women. The theme for these celebrations was the 'The Hidden Potential'.

As described by the President herself Mrs. Grace Attard, the theme could not have been more in line with the objectives that the Council has always cherished and strived for and more so today when it has become so vital to ensure that all men and women have access to opportunities to enable them to fulfil their ambitions.

As with all organisations, the work of the Council requires time, energy, dedication and more women who voluntarily are ready to give some time and expertise not only to promote the status of women from all walks of life but also to ensure that our society is enhanced by women's contribution.

The Health Committee is holding a talk on:

Sexual Health: The Silent Diseases

The talk will be delivered by Mr.Roderick Bugeja BSc (Hons).

Venue: NCW Centre

Date: Friday 15th October 2004

Time: 18:30 Hrs

Members and the General Public are invited. For further information please contact the NCW on:

tel: 21248881/21246982 or

e-mail: ncwmalta@camline.net.mt

30th Anniversary Celebrations

-Thanksgiving Mass-

As part of the celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Midwives Association, the executive committee is inviting all midwives and the couples who attended parentcraft classes at the Association during 2004, to a thanksgiving mass and presentation of babies. The mass will be held at the Attard Parish Church on Sunday 31st October 2004 at 4.30 pm. A reception will then follow at the parish centre.

This is an occasion for midwives to meet couples who have made use of the services provided by the association to unite and join in this wonderful experience. We will also be able to appreciate our profession and value the work that we carry out on a daily basis.

A souvenir will be given to each midwife and to each couple as a reminder of this event. So we invite you to join us and encourage all other midwives to come along. Each midwife will be receiving a personal invitation. If you have any difficulties kindly contact The Midwives' Association on Tel. /Fax: 21237117
or e-mail: rita.borg-xuereb@um.edu.mt

July 24 - 28 2005
Brisbane, Queensland
Australia

27th
Triennial Congress
International Confederation
of Midwives

Midwifery: Pathways to Healthy Nations

www.midwives2005.com

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The Newly Elected Executive Committee 2004

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| President: | Mrs. Rita Borg Xuereb |
| Vice-President | Mrs. Rita Pace Parascandolo |
| General Secretary: | Ms. Margaret M. Abela |
| Treasurer: | Mrs. Nathalie Zammit |
| Public Relations: | Mrs. Alexia Sciberras |
| Members: | Mrs. Gina Camilleri |
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