Maternity care: Engaging with families and communities

Introduction: Engaging with families and communities to promote maternal and infant health and wellbeing is an important aspect of care. Good evidence from around the world clearly demonstrates that when partners, families and local communities are involved, mothers and infants thrive. In addition, when considering the delivery of maternity services to diverse populations, there is evidence to suggest that expectant and new mothers are highly influenced by partner, families, friends and their local communities. Alloparents are significant in families, for example grandparents, other blood relatives and community neighbours who directly provide care and support to mothers and their infants. This supports the concept that ‘it takes a village to bring a child up’. However, implementing family inclusive approaches to maternity care pose challenges.

Aims: The aims of this study are: To gain an insight into how we can engage with families and communities; to explore historical and anthropological evidence that relates to family and community engagement; to describe and discuss some global studies that demonstrate better health outcomes; to describe and discuss studies the presenters has personally been involved with that have included engaging with families and communities; to introduce the Family Included Global Network.

Conclusions: There is an identified need to implement effective approaches to engage with families and communities throughout the world. A Family Included Global Network (FI) has recently been set up to enable health professionals and researchers throughout the world to network, collaborate, unite and pioneer the engagement of families and communities to improve maternal and infant health and wellbeing.

Biography
Mary Steen is a Professor of Midwifery at the University of South Australia and Visiting Professor at the Universities of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Sao Paulo, Brazil and Chester, UK. She is interested in a wide remit of midwifery and family health issues that has led her to undertake research studies in developed and developing countries. She has published her work widely and has written numerous articles, chapters and several books. She has received several awards for clinical innovation, original research and outstanding services to midwifery.

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