The PNG Midwifery Leadership Buddy Program; reflections from participants

Helen Hall & Julie Kemp, Facilitators of the PNG Midwifery Leadership Buddy Program

In 2018 the Australian College of Midwives and Papua New Guinea (PNG) Midwifery Society (PNGMS) secured funding from the Rotary Club of Morialta, Adelaide, to develop the PNG Midwifery Leadership Buddy Program (The Program). The Program is aimed at improving the maternal and newborn health in PNG, through strengthening the capacity of midwives to lead and implement quality maternity care.

The Program utilises a twinning approach (Cadee et al, 2013) where midwives form a mutually beneficial ‘Buddy’ relationship with someone from the other country. At the start of The Program, participants gather in Port Moresby for a four day leadership training workshop. The workshop is facilitated by two midwives; one from PNGMS and the other from ACM. The workshop includes a clinical immersion day, where all midwives have the opportunity to see a variety of educational and health facilities. During their time together, each Buddy pair develops a proposal for a quality improvement project, which they continue to work on together over the following 12 months.

In total, three cohorts (each with six Buddy pairs) will participate in the program. The first group completed the leadership workshop in March 2019 and have been partnering with their Buddy midwife since. The following reflections from each of the Buddy pairs captures some of their experiences to date.

Fabiana and Lesley

Fabiana Menem; Labour Ward, Paradise Private Hospital, Port Moresby, PNG

Lesley Brown; Nursing Director, Rural hospitals service group, Townsville hospital & health service

Fabiana: I felt privileged to be selected by the PNG Midwifery Society to attend the Leadership Buddy Program. Two months earlier, I was appointed as the Deputy Unit Manager in Labour Ward. It was a great challenge for me as a young midwife; I wondered if I could be a good leader and manager. However, having the opportunity to attend the Buddy Training, has given me the opportunity to consolidate my leadership skills. I am blessed to meet and know this amazing group of midwives; we share our varied skills, understandings and cultural background and values. It was with great joy and excitement I have come to know my buddy Lesley. We have established a strong relationship via emails, messenger, WhatsApp and even video calls. We are getting to know and understand each other very well; I am learning a lot from her and vice versa. We are working on a project to address a problem identified in my hospital: a high rate of anaemia during pregnancy (28.4%). The aim of our project is to identify the risk factors and to educate women about anaemia.

Lesley: The trip to PNG was great as it brought 12 midwives together who all want women to be able to access midwifery (maternity care) that is safe. Our day out visiting facilities was really good and helped the Australian buddies to understand where our Buddies worked and what resources they have available to them. Even though I had some understanding of hospital and health centres in other parts of our close neighbours in PNG and the Pacific, I personally found doing the workshops with our buddies and working together was both more challenging and more beneficial, than other leadership programs that I have completed. Being able to share and learn together is really important to reach our common goal. The passion and enthusiasm across the group assisted us to achieve so much. The sisterhood of midwifery is alive and well. We both are learning from each other in how we can achieve our project. I am now learning how to work with my PNG buddy from afar.

Fabiana and Lesley
Ellie and Bridget
Ellie Korave; midwifery educator, Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby, PNG.
Bridget Ferguson; midwifery educator, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Australia.

Ellie and Bridget have previously been employed together at PAU during 2014-2015, in a Maternal Child Health Initiative (MCHI). The MCHI sent international expert midwives called Clinical Midwifery Facilitators to work alongside Papua New Guinean tertiary educators to deliver both tertiary education and clinical supervision to midwifery students, with the intention of capacity building educators and increasing the midwifery workforce of PNG. This program was the first of its kind. Therefore it is with much joy and excitement that we have this opportunity to work together again. Re-establishing our connection and relationship has been particularly positive, manifesting robust conversation around the needs and barriers facing maternal and infant health and education in PNG. We decided to formulate a joint project to address issues that Ellie identified. These issues are lack of knowledge amongst reproductive aged people in regards to family planning, contraception, signs and symptoms of early pregnancy, the physiology of menstruation and ovulation, and STIs. We will produce educational resources in Tok Pisin such as a video and leaflet to be used amongst the student population at PAU, the local high school and the local village, Koiari Park. The aim is to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and empower both men and women to focus on positive habits and attitudes to their reproductive health.

Marina and Vanessa
Marina Paike: Midwifery lead in antenatal clinic, Gerehu General Hospital, Port Moresby, PNG.
Vanessa Page: Recently moved after 11 years as a remote area midwife in WA, Australia.

We were thrilled to be buddied up during the four day workshop held in Port Moresby earlier this year. Marina is the clinical midwifery lead in antenatal care at Gerehu General Hospital, which is also the area that Vanessa has specialised in during her 11 years working as a remote area Midwife in the West Kimberley, WA. Gerehu General Hospital was the first workplace visited by all the buddies on their immersion day, which helped everyone to understand a little about the challenges and triumphs that Marina faces on a daily basis in her workplace. It was interesting to compare Gerehu General Hospital with the other facilities, some of which were private and offered more with a fee.

Marina is concerned by the rising number of teenage pregnancies at Gerehu and the impact on health outcomes. She highlighted their lack of physical and mental maturity and therefore preparedness for parenthood, as well as the high rates of obstetric complications, chronic PID and associated ectopic pregnancies. Marina explained that there is insufficient sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education for young males, inconsistent SRH curriculum across the schools, poor compliance from men with regards to STI treatment, and the increasing inequality gap between boys and girls to complete their education. These factors are the basis behind our buddy project. We decided to send out letters to the six surrounding schools inviting them to participate in a survey on how SRH education is delivered in their respective schools. Collation of their responses will form the basis of part two of our project, which is preparing...
teachers to provide consistent quality SRH education to boys and girls in their schools.

**Jacinta and Michelle**

Jacinta Basil; midwife, Labour ward, Port Moresby General Hospital, PNG.

Michelle Mitchell; midwife, northern NSW, Australia.

Establishing a partnership together was the culmination of a new found friendship combined with a deep seated shared passion to see the rise of midwifery leaders and changes to the maternal/infant morbidity and mortality statistics in PNG. Worlds merged as we shared stories, knowledge, and experiences that held many similarities amidst the stark contrasts. We held space for each other by ‘listening to understand’ and the vision and the mission of our project was established to encompass compassionate and quality care through sustainable and achievable goals. Our project is called “The Continuous Compassionate Care in Labour Project” and its aim is to see all women receive best quality care and have the option to birth in privacy with a support person of their choice so they can feel safe, known and held. Our project is based on the elements of respectful maternity care, a universal right to childbearing women and it recognises that safe motherhood is more than the absence of death and injury – the preferences, feelings and choices of each woman are essential to her birth experience and transition to motherhood.

**Nancy and Jane**

Nancy Geregl: midwife, Central Highlands, Papua New Guinea

Jane Menke: midwife and educator, Northern NSW, Australia.

I (Jane) have been lucky enough to work in PNG before, on the WHO/UTS Maternal and Child Health Initiative so I already had a deep love and respect for PNG midwives and the incredibly challenging work they do every day in caring for mothers and their babies. Nancy and I met at the first Buddy Workshop in Port Moresby in March. We felt an immediate and strong connection to each other and are delighted to have this opportunity to work together in strengthening our midwifery ‘sisterhood’. We are working on one major research project together initiated by Nancy, related to cervical cancer screening and treatment in the Central Highlands of PNG, where Nancy lives and works. Due to Nancy’s hard work, she is now doing the data collection for her project. It will be exciting to see how the project evolves and to continue our connection throughout this work. We are looking forward to doing a presentation together as buddies on our project. We are also anticipating to do more research or projects on maternal child health issues in PNG and Pacific.

**Julie and Monica**

Julie Maso: midwife, Labour ward, Port Moresby General Hospital, PNG.

Monica Scott: midwife, Birth Centre, Canberra, Australia.

We share the passion of working with women in pregnancy as well as through labour and birth. We are both primarily clinical based midwives, who also have a leadership role in our work places. Exchanging stories is a commonality that midwives world-wide enjoy and it was whilst sharing stories at our workshop that we discovered that we had similar views. We believe that, in order to benefit a woman in pregnancy and improve outcomes for women and babies, it is important for her partner to be involved and important that they feel valued and therefore invested in the pregnancy. The project we have agreed to work together
on, is the production of a pamphlet, specifically aimed at men, in the antenatal period. This pamphlet will outline how they can best support their partner and why it is important to do so. The pamphlet will be written in Tok Pisin and be made available through the public antenatal clinics in Port Moresby.

The next cohort of Buddies will meet in Port Moresby in November. An expression of interest for midwives to participate in the final group, will be advertised on the ACM website in early 2020. You can read more about the The PNG Midwifery Leadership Buddy Program at: https://www.midwives.org.au/papua-new-guinea-png-leadership-buddy-program

The PNG Midwifery Leadership Buddy Program is supported by the Rotary Club of Morialta. If you would like to make a donation please visit: http://morialta.org.au/?page_id=4125

References

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