

## UCT Division of Nursing & Midwifery marks international days of the midwife and nurse in May

In May of each year, the two professions represented in the Division of Nursing & Midwifery mark their international days - **5 May** is the International Day of the Midwife and **12 May** (the birthday of Florence Nightingale) is International Nurses' Day.

This year the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) once again declares its theme as "The world needs midwives now more than ever" as the countdown to 2015 looms closer. With three of the eight millennium development goals (4, 5, and 6) very much part of the scope of midwives it is essential that there are appropriately educated and skilled midwives prepared for health services around the world. The ICM has published global standards for midwifery regulation, education and competencies for basic midwifery practice which can inform this.

In countries where the health service has increased the number of trained midwives remarkable reductions in maternal and perinatal mortality rates have occurred, e.g.

- Industrialised countries halved their MMR in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by providing professional midwifery care at childbirth
- Malaysia, Sri Lanka & Thailand halved their MMR within 10 years by increasing the number of midwives. In a further 15 years Thailand reduced its MMR from 200/100 000 to 50/100 000 by deploying even more midwives and by increasing the capacity of district hospitals
- Egypt doubled the proportion of births by skilled birth attendants and reduced its maternal mortality ratio by 50% (WHO/MPS/08.11)

In South Africa, despite most registered nurses also being qualified as midwives, there is no accurate database of how many practising midwives there are in the country. There is an urgent need to establish an accurate record and to ensure that the registered midwives are suitably educated and skilled to deliver the health service required by women and infants of this country.

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has adopted the theme of "Nurses: a force for change – a vital resource for health". As the largest group of health professionals, who are the closest and often the only available health workers to the population, nurses have a great responsibility and the greatest possibility to improve the health of the population, and thus to contribute towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. "Equitable access to necessary health services of good quality cannot be achieved without an adequate number of appropriately prepared nurses." (ICN, 2014:6)

While there is a nursing shortage in many countries, just adding more nurses is not the complete solution but improving the work environment is a key aspect of improving patient safety and the quality of health care. A recent study published in the Lancet demonstrated that:

- a 10% increase in the proportion of nurses holding a bachelor degree is associated with a 7% decrease in the risk of death
- every extra patient added to a nurse's workload increases the chance of surgical patients dying within 30 days of admission by 7%
- these associations imply that patients in hospitals, in which 60% of nurses had bachelor's degrees and nurses cared for an average of six patients, would have almost 30% lower mortality than patients in hospitals in which only 30% of nurses had bachelor's degrees and nurses cared for an average of eight patients. (Aiken, Sloane *et al*, 2014).

This study consolidates the growing amount of proof from different regions of the world that quality nursing education and safe staffing levels have a direct impact on patient survival (Shamian, 2014).

Both professions are calling for the preparation of appropriately educated and skilled midwives and nurses in sufficient numbers and deploying them appropriately in supportive and resourced settings is essential for the health of the world's population.

The UCT Division of Nursing and Midwifery has a long tradition of significant contributions to national (SANC, DENOSA, SOMSA, FUNDISA) and international (ICM and ICN) leadership of both professions over the years and continues to do so.

We celebrate our nurses and midwives who provide health care across the lifespan, in multiple settings and often unrecognised and valued. Indeed, nurses and midwives are a force for change and a vital resource for health.

A/Prof Sheila Clow

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**Contact:** A/Prof Pat Mayers, Acting Head of Division: [Pat.Mayers@uct.ac.za](mailto:Pat.Mayers@uct.ac.za) / [Usanda.Qukula@uct.ac.za](mailto:Usanda.Qukula@uct.ac.za)

**For more information:**

[www.internationalmidwives.org](http://www.internationalmidwives.org)

[www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch)

[www.stateoftheworldsmidwifery.com](http://www.stateoftheworldsmidwifery.com)

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