



## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE, 2020

Strengthening nursing and midwifery to achieve universal health coverage

5 May, 2020

In this International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, the **International Day of the Midwife, 2020** is yet another opportunity to celebrate the extraordinary work of nurses and midwives. It also provides renewed focus on the need for increased investments in the nursing and midwifery workforce.

Health workers are at the forefront of COVID-19 response, working amidst challenges to provide essential health services. The entire health response teams are working long hours and in close contact with the patients who are sometimes pre-symptomatic. This puts them and their families at the risk of getting infected. Considering the fact that midwifery care includes being in close touch with the mothers and their newborn, midwives are no exception. On this International Day of the Midwife, WHO salutes the strong spirit of midwives and their family members for their contribution towards providing essential health services and quality care to mothers and newborns.

Midwifery as a service recognizes and values pregnancy, labour, birth and post-natal period as a healthy, precious and profound experience that a woman goes through in her life. The contribution of midwives to the scientific community, and to the society in general, in making childbirth a positive experience is substantial. Global evidence shows that safe and effective midwifery care can avert 83% of all maternal deaths, stillbirths, and newborn deaths. Specifically, in the Indian context, midwifery care has the potential to reduce maternal and newborn deaths by significant numbers.

India has over two million nurse-midwives and nearly 900 000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs). In its extraordinary leadership in



midwifery, in addition to the already existing workforce, the Government of India has committed to an additional 85 000 midwives by 2023. WHO applauds this move and recognises investment in midwifery services as an investment towards health for all. In 2020, as the first batch of professional midwives initiate their training, WHO takes pride in supporting the government in the design and implementation of this policy initiative. India is progressing rapidly and there is a strong momentum for furthering quality midwifery services across the country.

Despite the efforts, there still are visible gaps in nursing-midwifery workforce in India. The challenges of the pandemic have put health workers at more strain to work for long hours. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore, these challenges with regards to unfilled vacancies and shortage of nurses and midwives. This pandemic has presented an opportunity to address these gaps and the International Day of the Midwife is an opportune moment for stock-taking. It also provides the platform for greater focus on the overall goal of further strengthening the frontline services to achieve health for all, boost leadership, and invest in making nursing-midwifery care central to primary health care.

Midwives along with nurses and other health workers are facing discrimination because of heightened fear and misinformation about COVID-19. There is an urgent need to counter such prejudices and respond appropriately. Besides, long hours, fatigue, and workplace safety concerns have made the lives of frontline workers even harder in this crisis. Let's come together to show our respect, appreciation and support.

The ethos of midwifery care is to work in partnership with women and her family to provide holistic care. Midwifery not just focuses on *the provision of care* but places the *experience of care* at the heart of its services. Teamwork is a core component of midwifery-led-care, which enables midwives to provide high-quality respectful care, timely management of complications, and seamless referrals by working closely with obstetricians and other frontline health response team. Let us all work in partnership and team spirit, as midwives do, by recognizing their contribution and enabling them to take care of our women and newborns.

Sincerely,

**Dr Henk Bekedam**  
WHO Representative to India

