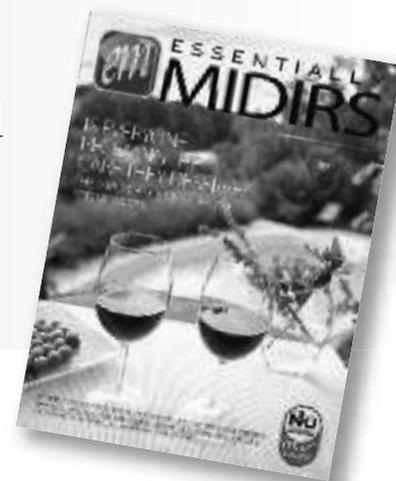


midirs Writes



Editorial comment on issues addressed in this month's Essentially MIDIRS...

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Comment by
Sara Wickham Editor

The Importance of the Intangible

From the bitterness of disease man learns the sweetness of health Catalan proverb

With apologies to the MIDIRS Information department, whose reaction to the thought of people simultaneously pressing 'shift' and F7 on their computer keyboard is not dissimilar to that of Tinkerbell encountering a non-believer (*clap clap clap, I DO believe in using books made of real paper*), the thesaurus on my computer offers more than a hundred words that define and are linked with the word *well*. Almost all of them are positive and they span a number of dimensions relating to notions of health, satisfaction, appropriateness,

comfort, thoroughness, intimacy, good-naturedness and clearness. One happy little grouping of terms mentions water, springs and fountains, and another touches on abundance and growth.

I had looked up the word *well* because it had suddenly occurred to me that two of the articles in this issue, while being quite different from each other, had something in common. They address important but not always overtly tangible concepts relating to notions of wellness which are defined more often by their absence. Firstly, Judy Edmunds (2013), who herein wins the prize for best author photo ever,

has written about wellness for midwives. I am delighted that Judy is writing about this topic, because self-care is a vitally important piece of the midwifery jigsaw which doesn't get nearly enough attention. I recall that, at one of my very first university lectures, we were given the WHO (1948) definition of health which notes that this is '*...not merely the absence of disease...*' and yet even with this level of global agreement many cultures still focus on illness and disease and many of us pay little attention — either individually or collectively — to what constitutes,

promotes and maintains our health and wellness.

The same is true no matter whether we are considering our own health and well-being or that of the women and babies we attend, and the central theme of Alice David's (2013) article also relates to the importance of considering where we place our focus. Alice draws our attention to another dimension of the concept of wellness in asking us to consider what went well. This question is crucially important in a culture of maternity services that so often seems focused on looking at what went badly, on where blame can be apportioned and on what measures can be brought in to ensure that the same (often complex, unpredictable and unpreventable) chain of events that occurred before a poor outcome cannot happen again. It is not just a case of needing to move beyond the blame culture, within which it has somehow become acceptable for people to justify their own fumbling, failings or inappropriate actions by blaming others. We do need to take responsibility for our own responsibilities, actions and decisions, but we also need, as Alice suggests, to consider what went well and how we can learn from this. If wellness — in multiple senses of the word — became our focus, then we might live, work, practice and give birth in a rather different world.

In order to reach that world, we may have to stretch our imaginations and exercise other little-used parts of ourselves, because this is the less tangible path. It is far easier to define, judge, label and focus on the abnormal, the symptom picture, the potentially risky or the allegedly erroneous than it is to put in the work that it takes to contemplate the less quantifiable state that is wellness. Maybe this is because wellness is a relative, individual, shifting concept, involving the need to adapt or balance. For some people, it involves linking with other concepts that are difficult to talk about and quantify: authenticity, heart-centredness, realness. These are

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some of the touchstones that I have tried to bring to the pages of *Essentially MIDIRS*, because these very intangible concepts are also the pathways that women journey along and the very mysteries with which midwives have always worked, day and night. We mustn't be afraid to face the intangible or explore the pathways less travelled. And we certainly shouldn't shy away from taking care of ourselves, contemplating what is authentic or taking time to focus on what causes things to go well.

It is with enormous sadness that I have resigned from my role as Editor of *Essentially MIDIRS*, and the October 2013 issue will be my last as Editor. I am just as sad to say goodbye to a number of colleagues and friends who have also left their posts and roles, including *MIDIRS Midwifery Digest* co-editors Nadine Edwards and Becky Reed and the members of the

Essentially MIDIRS Advisory Panel. This (September) issue also presents the last of Lorna Davies' popular 'Sitting Next to Nellie' series. All of these women have played a huge role in making *Essentially MIDIRS* what she is today, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of them for the amazing support, advice and expertise that they have given to me and to *MIDIRS* over the years.

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