



"Empowering Motherhood: Unveiling the Imperative of Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) and Ensuring Universal Rights for Childbearing Women"

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About the author: *Dr. (Prof.) Meenu Paul is an accomplished professional in the field of nursing, holding a BSc in Nursing and an MSc in Obstetrics and Gynecology Nursing from RGUHS, Bangalore. Her academic journey reached its pinnacle with a Ph.D. in Obstetrics and Gynecology Nursing from Malwanchal University, Indore. With over 15 years of rich and diverse experience, Dr. Meenu Paul has emerged as a leading expert in the realm of women's health. Currently serving as a dedicated faculty member at Anushree College of Nursing in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her role.*

Dr. Meenu Paul's extensive academic background, coupled with her years of hands-on experience, positions her as a thought leader in the nursing community. Her commitment to advancing the field is evident through her research and academic pursuits. Driven by a passion for improving maternal and newborn healthcare, she actively contributes to the discourse on Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) as a universal human right. As the author of numerous scholarly articles and research papers, Dr. Meenu Paul plays a pivotal role in shaping conversations around compassionate and respectful maternity care. Her work reflects a dedication to the principles of dignity, autonomy, and equality in maternal healthcare. With a profound understanding of the complexities within the healthcare system, Dr. Meenu Paul's insights inspire both students and colleagues alike, fostering a culture of empathy and excellence in nursing education.

In her current role at Anushree College of Nursing, Dr. Meenu Paul continues to impact the next generation of healthcare professionals. Her commitment to instilling the importance of RMC as a fundamental right echoes in her teachings, contributing to the development of compassionate and patient-centered care practitioners. Dr. (Prof.) Meenu Paul stands as a beacon of expertise, advocating for respectful maternity care and making enduring contributions to the advancement of women's health in India.

Abstract

While advancements have been made in reducing maternal mortality, a critical aspect often overlooked is the issue of abuse and disrespect during maternity care. Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) goes beyond skilled attendance at birth; it is an attitude that permeates every aspect of care during pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal periods. This article discusses the significance of RMC as a universal human right, emphasizing its role in promoting quality maternity care and safeguarding the fundamental rights of childbearing women.

Introduction

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) stands as a fundamental right rather than a mere option, affirming the inherent dignity and human rights of

every woman during childbirth. In the context of maternal and newborn health in India, the acknowledgment of RMC as an essential component not only reflects the quality of care but also acts as a



bulwark for safeguarding the fundamental rights of women in the process of childbirth.

India has witnessed commendable progress in maternal and newborn health in recent years, with increased awareness, improved healthcare infrastructure, and innovative interventions. However, amidst these positive developments, challenges persist, underscoring the imperative to prioritize and ensure respectful and compassionate maternity care for all. The statement, "Respectful Maternity Care is not an option: It's a Right," resonates deeply in this landscape, urging a shift in perspective from viewing RMC as an elective feature to recognizing it as an inalienable right.

At its core, RMC embodies the principles of dignity, autonomy, and equality in maternal healthcare. The journey of pregnancy and childbirth is profoundly personal, and every woman deserves to be treated with respect, compassion, and empathy during this transformative experience. The assertion that RMC is a right emphasizes the non-negotiable nature of these principles, reinforcing the idea that no woman should be deprived of dignified and compassionate care during one of the most vulnerable periods of her life.

Despite advances in medical technology and healthcare practices, stories of mistreatment, neglect, and violation of women's rights during childbirth persist. Instances of disrespectful and abusive behavior, ranging from verbal abuse to unnecessary medical interventions, highlight the urgent need to institutionalize RMC as a non-negotiable standard. The realization that RMC is not an option but a right brings attention to the imperative of eliminating these harmful practices and creating an environment where every woman feels valued, heard, and respected during childbirth.

Furthermore, incorporating RMC into the fabric of maternal healthcare is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic approach to improving overall health outcomes. Evidence suggests that women

who experience respectful and supportive maternity care are more likely to seek timely and appropriate healthcare, fostering positive maternal and newborn health outcomes. By recognizing RMC as a right, policymakers, healthcare providers, and communities can work collaboratively to dismantle barriers, challenge societal norms, and implement policies that prioritize the well-being and dignity of child-bearing women.

In the Indian context, where diverse cultural, social, and economic factors influence maternal healthcare, the acknowledgment of RMC as a right becomes even more crucial. It serves as a unifying principle that transcends regional disparities and underscores the universal significance of respecting women's rights during childbirth. Empowering women with the assurance that RMC is their right fosters a sense of agency, encouraging them to actively participate in decisions related to their healthcare, thereby contributing to more equitable and patient-centered maternity care.

Definition

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines RMC as the organization and management of health systems prioritizing respect for women's sexual and reproductive health and human rights. At its core, RMC is an embodiment of compassionate care, emphasizing positive interpersonal relations and preserving the dignity, confidentiality, and privacy of clients.

Concept of Compassionate Care

Midwives play a crucial role in providing compassionate care during childbirth. Their competency, both in the technical and affective domains, is vital in ensuring positive childbirth experiences. Compassion, a cornerstone of midwifery care, is acknowledged as an essential competency, contributing to emotional intelligence and the use of soft skills such as kindness and empathy. The concept of compassionate care is central to the role of midwives, who play a pivotal role in



facilitating positive childbirth experiences. Beyond their technical proficiency, midwives possess a unique blend of competencies, including a deep understanding of the affective domain. Compassion, defined by kindness, empathy, and emotional intelligence, forms the bedrock of midwifery care.

Midwives, with their specialized training, recognize the significance of not only addressing the physical aspects of childbirth but also attending to the emotional and psychological needs of the women in their care. The empathetic connection established by midwives fosters a sense of trust and security, creating an environment conducive to positive birthing experiences. Their ability to navigate the delicate balance between clinical expertise and compassionate understanding is instrumental in promoting maternal well-being.

In embracing compassion as a core competency, midwives contribute significantly to a holistic approach to healthcare. This ethos goes beyond the routine procedures and technical aspects of childbirth, acknowledging the profound impact of emotional support and understanding on the overall well-being of mothers. Ultimately, the concept of compassionate care underscores the irreplaceable role of midwives in not only delivering babies but also in providing comfort, reassurance, and a human touch during the transformative journey of childbirth.

Growing Evidence of Disrespect & Abuse - Calls for RMC

Despite advancements, evidence of disrespect and abuse in maternity care is a growing concern globally. Pregnant women often face ill-treatment, ranging from subtle disrespect to outright abuse. The seven major categories of disrespect and abuse include physical abuse, non-consented clinical care, non-confidential care, non-dignified care, discrimination, abandonment, and detention in facilities.

A childbearing women entrust her health worker for a relationship characterized by gentle, effective communication, support, kindness & respect. Unfortunately, too many women experience care that does not match this image. A growing body of research evidence, experience & case reports collected in maternity care systems from the wealthiest to poorest nations worldwide paints a different & disturbing picture. Pregnant women seeking maternity care from the health systems in their countries instead receive ill treatment that ranges from relatively subtle disrespect on their autonomy & dignity to outright abuse like physical assault, verbal insults, discrimination, abandonment or detention in facilities for failure to pay. Browser & Hill(2010) described seven major categories of disrespect & abuse that childbearing women encounter during maternity care. These categories occur along a continuum from subtle disrespect & humiliation to overt violence.

- *Physical abuse*
- *Non-consented clinical care*
- *Non confidential care*
- *Non dignified care(including verbal abuse)*
- *Discrimination based on specific patient attributes*
- *Abandonment or denial of care*
- *Detention in facilities*

Disrespect & abuse of women seeking maternity care is becoming an urgent problem creating a growing community of concern that spans the domains of healthcare research, quality & education, human rights & civil rights advocacy.

Rights of a Childbearing Mother

Every woman has the right to be free from harm, informed consent, privacy, dignity, equality, and autonomy in maternity care. RMC encompasses



various domains, including being free from harm, having privacy, receiving dignified care, informed consent, continuous support, and effective communication.

In seeking & receiving maternity care before, during & after childbirth

1. Every woman has the right to be free from harm & ill treatment. No one can physically abuse her.
2. Every women has the right to information, informed consent & refusal & respect for her choices & preferences, including companionship during maternity care. No one can force or do things to you without your knowledge & consent.
3. Every woman has the right to privacy & confidentiality. No one can expose her or her personal information.
4. Every woman has the right to be treated with dignity & respect. No one can humiliate or verbally abuse her.
5. Every woman has the right to equality, freedom from discrimination & equitable care. No one can discriminate because of something they do not like about her.
6. Every woman has the right to liberty, autonomy, self-determination & freedom from coercion. No one can detain her or her baby without legal authority.

Principles of Respectful Maternity Care

- a. Ensuring freedom from harm and mistreatment;
- b. Providing privacy and maintaining confidentiality;
- c. Upholding dignity in care delivery;
- d. Offering information and support for informed consent;

e. Facilitating ongoing access to family and community support;

f. Ensuring a high-quality physical environment and adequate resources;

g. Striving for equitable maternity care;

h. Fostering effective communication between healthcare providers and patients;

i. Affording women the autonomy to make choices and decisions;

j. Ensuring the availability of competent and motivated human resources;

k. Delivering care that is efficient, effective, and continuous.

Performance Standards for RMC

Performance standards for RMC are essential to gauge healthcare workers' clinical performance in promoting RMC. These standards cover childbirth care and antenatal/postnatal care, providing objective guidelines for training, supervision, and program management.

Standards for Respectful Maternity Care Performance

The performance standards for Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) consist of two primary components: Childbirth Care and Antenatal and Postnatal Care. This dual framework, complemented by verification criteria, establishes clear and measurable guidelines to assess the clinical performance of healthcare workers, fostering the promotion of RMC. These standards serve various purposes, including:

1. Facilitating the training of healthcare providers in delivering quality RMC,
2. Providing supervisory guidance to support healthcare workers in integrating RMC principles in their workplace,



3. Assisting program managers in identifying essential clinical behaviors necessary to ensure the provision of RMC to women.

These standards can be utilized independently or integrated into existing facility standards for childbirth, antenatal care, and postnatal care. By incorporating RMC performance standards, healthcare institutions aim to enhance the overall quality and compassion in maternity care services

Role of Communication in Delivering RMA Effectively

Effective communication is a key factor in delivering RMC. It not only enhances the woman's experience but also boosts health professionals' confidence and reduces complaints. Proper communication is crucial in promoting understanding and collaboration between healthcare providers and patients.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the philosophy of Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) stands as a beacon for improving maternal and newborn health globally. At its core, RMC is an approach that places individual needs, ethical principles, and the fundamental respect for human rights at the forefront of maternity care. This approach is not merely a set of guidelines but a commitment to fostering a healthcare environment that is empathetic, dignified, and empowering for women during childbirth.

RMC champions the acknowledgment of women's preferences, understanding that each childbirth journey is unique and deeply personal. By prioritizing women's autonomy and choices, RMC contributes to a positive and empowering childbirth experience, transcending the traditional model of healthcare delivery. It signifies a paradigm shift towards a more patient-centered approach, where the well-being and agency of the woman are paramount.

In the pursuit of better maternal and newborn health outcomes, prioritizing Respectful Maternity Care is

not just a recommended practice; it emerges as a fundamental right for every woman. Recognizing RMC as a right underscores the non-negotiable nature of providing care that is not only medically sound but also compassionate and respectful. This holistic approach aligns with the broader goals of promoting human rights in healthcare, fostering a culture of empathy, and ensuring that every woman, regardless of socio-economic status or geographic location, receives care that upholds her dignity and rights during the transformative journey of childbirth.

As we continue to advance in healthcare practices and policies globally, integrating and prioritizing Respectful Maternity Care emerges as an ethical imperative. It not only contributes to improved maternal and newborn health outcomes but also fosters a culture of compassion and empathy within healthcare systems. In the ongoing efforts to build a healthier and more equitable world, embracing RMC as a fundamental right for every woman is a crucial step towards achieving comprehensive and dignified maternity care for all.

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