

A paper highlighting the role of TBAs in the implementation of primary health care

Abstract:

In highlighting the role of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in the implementation of primary health care (PHC) in Kenya, the following topics are discussed: characteristics of TBAs as reported in studies, the training program, program objectives, content, the training process, resources for training, the role of TBAs in PHC, and evaluation. The definition of midwife is given as midwives trained in a community setting to assist in delivery within the confines of accepted cultural beliefs. A study of 28 midwives from different regions in Kenya in 1980 found that most were illiterate women between 24 and 68 years olds received no monetary gain, had a variety of occupational backgrounds, and provided varying amounts of advice but little pre- or postnatal care. Almost all advised mothers to breast feed for at least 2 years. 80% of mother use TBAs for delivery. In order to minimize maternal (5-20/1000 live births on the average) and infant mortality, many countries have or are developing training programs for TBAs. Inadequacies in TBA care may be little prenatal care, too little postnatal care, and deficits in promoting child spacing; other unsafe practices may be improper washing of hands and severing the umbilical cord with unsterile objects. Other advantages of training TBAs involve less cost, less need for transportation, personalized setting in the home, source of health education in the community, and rapport with her clients. The training program goal is to reduce mortality by eliminating bad practices. The objectives are to reduce maternal deaths or illness from hemorrhage, infection, and toxemia; to encourage better nutrition; to reduce perineal or vaginal tears which may lead to longterm disability from urinary or rectal fistula; to reduce the number of pregnancies or exposure to risk; and to reduce neonatal tetanus asphyxia, infection, diarrhea, and malnutrition. Activities entail educating adolescent girls and pregnant women on menstruation and sexuality within cultural norms, prenatal care and delivery and postnatal care, maternal care, and educating mothers about personal hygiene, nutrition, child spacing, and immunization, and acknowledgement of the valuable service TBAs contribute to the community. Programs have operated for 10 years and evaluation is underway.