

Midwives can deliver improved health literacy to patients

July 23 2014, by David Ellis

Researchers at the University of Adelaide have shown new media technologies such as smart phone apps may be an effective means of improving health outcomes for new mothers and their babies.

A health communication study at a South Australian hospital found that midwives are already trying to raise the level of health literacy among their patients by providing informal verbal advice and printed material. However, a more standardised approach is needed to make this role more effective and to improve health.

The research also suggests that midwives could provide better information and support through the use of new media technologies.

"Midwives are very aware of the importance of delivering tailored health information that best meets the needs of [pregnant women](#), however, their ability to do so is constrained by a number of factors including informal counselling and a reliance on printed brochures," says corresponding author Dr Dianne Rodger, Senior Research Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Adelaide, and affiliate with the University's Robinson Research Institute.

"The comprehensive smart phone app we've developed could help midwives and other antenatal staff, who often lack resources and training specific to this task, to provide the best possible advice," Dr Rodger says.

"What is clear is that midwives have a commitment to improving health communication and to women and their families, and this is something that can be capitalised on for the benefit of the community."

In their study, published in the international journal *Midwifery*, the researchers say that innovative strategies may be needed to get the health message across.

"Most pregnant women and new mothers are already turning to the internet for information. It is important for health professionals to be providing reliable information in that space for these women to access," Dr Rodger says.

This study is part of a broader research project called 'Health-e Baby', looking at the use of alternative communication strategies and technologies to promote health to the community.

Julia Dalton, a Research Midwife with the University's Robinson Research Institute, says: "Pregnant women often lack knowledge in relation to their own care and how that affects their unborn or newborn children. Having the right approach and resources to effectively engage pregnant women is vital if a change in behaviour is sought by health professionals."

More information: M. Wilmore, D. Rodger, S. Humphreys, V.L. Clifton, J. Dalton, M. Flabouris, A. Skuse, "How midwives tailor health information used in antenatal care," *Midwifery*, Available online 23 June 2014, ISSN 0266-6138, [DOI: 10.1016/j.midw.2014.06.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2014.06.004).

Provided by University of Adelaide

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