

# Report: Maternal and Child Health Nurses Survey 2008

## Introduction and Methodology

In December last year ANF in conjunction with the Victorian Association of Maternal and Child Health Nurses (ANF Vic Branch Special Interest Group), conducted an online survey of Maternal and Child Health Nurses about their views on the qualification requirements to practise as an MCH Nurse.

The survey was emailed to 325 MCH Nurses from both the ANF database and the VAMCHN SIG database. A further 164 were posted to MCH Nurses whose email addresses we did not have. A total of 489 survey invitations were distributed, with 293 completed surveys returned to the ANF (60% response rate). Results were analysed using SPSS and thematic analysis conducted of the open ended questions. The results are presented in this report, including themes that highlight the importance of underpinning Midwifery and General Nursing qualifications to the Maternal and Child Health Nurse.

## Brief Outline of Survey

Participants were asked to respond to the following 4 questions:

1. A midwifery qualification provides comprehensive knowledge and skills which are essential for MCH nursing. Participants were asked to respond to this statement by stating the extent to which they agree/disagree.
2. Please provide some evidence (including examples and case studies) to support your response [to question 1].
3. A general nursing qualification provides comprehensive knowledge and skills which are essential for MCH nursing. Participants were asked to respond to this statement by stating the extent to which they agree/disagree.
4. Please provide some evidence (including examples and case studies) to support your response [to question 3].

## Key Findings

### **1. A midwifery qualification provides comprehensive knowledge and skills which are essential for MCH nursing.**

Participants were asked to respond to this statement by stating the extent to which they agree/disagree. Results are presented below.

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent (%)
Strongly agree	230	78.5%
Agree	13	4.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1.4%
Disagree	8	2.7%
Strongly disagree	37	12.6%
Missing	1	0.3%
Total	293	100.0%

The vast majority (83%) of respondents strongly agree/agree that a Midwifery qualification is an essential prerequisite to Maternal and Child Health Nursing.

**2. Please provide some evidence (including examples and case studies) to support your response [to question 1].**

When asked to provide evidence, the following themes emerged. The themes all relate to knowledge/skills/abilities that stem from the respondent's midwifery qualification and are used in their role as an MCH Nurse. The main themes that were highlighted are: Lactation skills/breastfeeding advice/establishment of breastfeeding assistance (37%); knowledge of conception, pregnancy, foetal development, childbirth and postpartum (29%) and having the skills to assess/recognise physical and psychological symptoms/complications with both mother and baby (22%). Whilst the following is reported in percentages, please note that respondents were able to highlight numerous themes, therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Top 5 Themes	Percent (%)
1. Lactation skills/breastfeeding advice/establishment of breastfeeding assistance	37%
2. Thorough knowledge of conception, pregnancy, fetal development, childbirth and postpartum	29%
3. Skills to assess and recognise physical and psychological symptoms/complications with both mother and baby	22%
4. Midwifery is vital to MCHN role/essential to total patient care and best practice	21%
5. Allows to empathise with the woman and provide counselling about all aspects of women's health/imperative for the nurse to function holistically and empathetically	20%

**Other themes that emerged include:**

1. Midwifery provides knowledge to talk to parents to debrief after labour & delivery/answer any questions raised on delivery/dispel myths and clarify any misunderstandings.
2. Provides good knowledge of antenatal and delivery complication.
3. Allows for antenatal and postnatal skills, knowledge and advice.
4. Enables good follow up care and to continue the care and education of a mother and child, including support for the family and parenting advice.
5. Provides sound understanding of complications in newborns e.g. jaundice, in SCN, NICU, premature babies.
6. Understanding of the impact of a difficult and/or traumatic labour and the ability to recognise postnatal depression.
7. Assists with the understanding of the childbirth experience and health related issues of the mother.
8. Knowledge of newborn physical development, and childhood health and development.
9. Ability to refer to, communicate with, and accept referrals from other health professionals and/or other agencies.
10. Provides skills and abilities to recognise complications and/or illness that may not have been diagnosed and treated while an inpatient.
11. Knowledge of difficult/dangerous conditions of pregnancy is an essential part of the MCHN role e.g. pre-eclampsia/HELLP syndrome, pregnancies incompatible with life.
12. Provides an understanding of the mother/baby relationship and of their emotional wellbeing following delivery.
13. Midwifery together with General Nursing qualifications and MCHN training are all equally important.

14. Knowledge of the “hospital experience” helpful to mothers.
15. Provides knowledge of female reproductive system/skills to provide fertility advice.
16. Provides an understanding and ability to provide assistance with stillborn and neonatal death.
17. Victoria has a superior service to other states and countries due to Midwifery requirement.
18. Midwifery is important for the professional standing of MCHNs.
19. Ability to provide advice and support for mothers whose babies have ongoing serious conditions, e.g. Cerebral Palsy, Downs Syndrome and/or special needs e.g. naso-gastric feeding/oxygen therapy.
20. Midwifery provides skills to act immediately to avert crisis for mother/baby.

**3. A general nursing qualification provides comprehensive knowledge and skills which are essential for MCH nursing.**

Participants were asked to respond to this statement by stating the extent to which they agree/disagree.

The vast majority 70% of respondents strongly agree/agree that a General Nursing qualification is an essential prerequisite to Maternal and Child Health Nursing.

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent (%)
Strongly agree	164	56.0%
Agree	40	13.7%
Disagree	12	4.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	23	7.8%
Strongly disagree	52	17.7%
Missing	2	0.7%
Total	293	100.0%

**4. Please provide some evidence (including examples and case studies) to support your response [to question 3].**

When asked to provide evidence, the following themes emerged. The themes all relate to knowledge/skills/abilities that stem from the respondent’s General Nursing qualification and are used in their role as an MCH Nurse. The main themes that highlighted are: provides a background knowledge which is essential for safe practice (33%); provides skills and knowledge to make assessments/recognise symptoms and treat various conditions that are not covered in Midwifery (30%); and to provide holistic family care, which recognises that MCH nurses not only care for mother and baby but their role extends to the whole family (26%). Whilst the following is reported in percentages, please note that respondents were able to highlight numerous themes, therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Top 5 Themes	Percent (%)
1. Background basic knowledge/anatomy and physiology/essential for safe practice	33%
2. Provides skills and knowledge to make assessments/recognise symptoms and treat various conditions, that are not covered in Midwifery	30%
3. Holistic family care/best practice including knowledge of hereditary patterns/allergy	26%
4. General nursing together with mid are essential prerequisite for MCH nursing, provides well balanced education/Vic MCH service is superior	12%
5. Referral to other health specialists	10%

**Other themes that emerged include:**

1. Provides knowledge to talk to parents/answer questions/provide support and advice/debrief.
2. Gives skills to be able to care for the mother when she has a pre-existing medical condition and how it impacts on parenting.
3. The importance of mental health/psych issues e.g. postnatal depression.
4. The need for a sound understanding of surgical and medical procedures/post-op care
5. General nursing is an essential prerequisite.
6. Paediatrics/neonatal experience is important.
7. Allows for the understanding of medications/pharmacology.
8. Provides a knowledge of the mother's experience within the hospital system/processes.
9. Assists working as a sole practitioner.
10. Provides a sound understanding of childhood development.
11. Helps to give confidence and reassure the client.
12. Assists with the health and wellbeing of mother and child, e.g. knowledge of good nutrition and exercise/healthy lifestyle.
13. Helps to engage with vulnerable families, e.g. provides the skills to recognise domestic violence/substance abuse.
14. Enables an understanding of infectious diseases/immunisation.
15. Provides skills and abilities to recognise complications/illness that were not diagnosed and treated while an inpatient.

**Where to from here?**

ANF (Vic Branch) has received a letter from Mr Nigel Fidgeon, CEO of the Nurses Board of Victoria, informing us that "At the February 2009 Nurses Board of Victoria Board meeting, the Board determined to continue with the current regulation of Maternal and Child Health Nurses due to the impending introduction of the national legislation for the accreditation and registration for health professionals....."

Clearly, further work relating to the qualifications of MCHNs will be an issue to be dealt with by the new National Nursing & Midwifery Board following 1 July 2010. This work will relate to issues such as the current Victorian requirement for a nursing undergraduate degree and midwifery postgraduate qualifications, appropriateness of direct entry midwives undertaking MCH nursing and MCHNs versus early childhood development worker.

ANF thanks MCHNs for their participation in this research we have conducted and we will continue to advise you on this important matter.