

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY NURSES IN THE CARE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF MOTHERS AND THE STABILIZATION OF MOTHERLY SKILLS IN GROUP MEETINGS

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Abstract

Motherhood and parenthood are a significant and very difficult period in a person's life. Considering today's family crisis, professional support and help with managing tasks regarding motherhood seem very important. This article summarizes the information, experience and conclusions of researches which deal with the support of young families with establishing and managing mother/parent groups. Considering the increasingly shorter stay in hospitals after birth and the character of the following care, the time for education and the important support regarding motherly skills is limited as well. Parent meetings can be an appropriate way of supporting parents on a community level.

Key words: *motherhood; parent groups; community care; infant period; pediatric nurse; management*

INTRODUCTION

Childbirth and childcare are an important role in a parent's life. It is a very difficult period in which people take a new complex identity in the process of adapting to a new life task; the obligations and relationships related to parenthood. Gardner and Deatrick (2006) consider the first two years of the life of a child the most important and, contemporarily, the most difficult. It is the period when two adults gradually adapt to the role of a parent and accept the responsibility for the upbringing and care of their offspring. In this situation, paediatric nurses play an important role in strengthening the parental skills and facilitating the adaptation to the new life situation.

Motherhood is a process which comprises a great number of changes in the social, behavioural and self-concept fields,

where the personal identity, approaches and emotions gradually change, which largely influences one's mental perception and experience. Although many women link motherhood to a positive experience, and it is a reason for being proud, others see it as a period full of stress and inconvenience in which they struggle for a positive relationship towards their child (Redshaw and Martin 2011).

The basic need of a primipara is identifying herself with the role of a mother, which includes her adaptation to motherly tasks and taking full responsibility for the care and the upbringing of her child. Prenatal preparation and the following professional support play an important role in this process of change (Kiehl and White 2003). Liu et al. (2012) state that the successful identification with the role of a mother is the basis for the woman's ability to effectively satisfy the physical,

emotional, behavioural and social needs of her child and to adequately respond to her child's signals. It is an important component in the development of the relationship between a mother and child.

Therefore, there is no doubt that pregnancy, birth and the following postnatal period are mentally very stressful for parents and that they increase the emotional vulnerability of mothers. A large number of women experience the so called postnatal blues, a condition associated with tearfulness, mood swings, melancholy and slight cognitive difficulties. The condition is not yet pathological and it is labelled as a short period of physiological dysphoria, which occurs early after birth and disappears after a few days. If it lasts longer, it can become a predictive factor for the incidence of postnatal depression. Denis et al. (2012) describe the direct link between the incidence of postnatal depression and the adaptation to the role of a mother. They state that mothers who feel insecure and unable to take care of their child properly are unconfident and face depressions more frequently.

In this period, it is important for young families to have access to quality professional help and support. One type of such support is the work of nurses in the communities of mothers, newborns and infants. In the last few years, community care has focused on the support of healthy parenthood and motherhood with case management, visiting households, field programs and facilitatory groups. The need for support in pregnancy, parenthood and a child's early age is emphasized as a strategy for the long-term preservation of good health of the population (Borrow et al. 2011).

The following part presents the importance of the community work of nurses in supporting mothers' psychological well-being and developing their motherly skills by establishing and managing parent groups.

The influence of groups of mothers/parents on the mental condition of parents

The professional influence within parent groups can be very helpful in creating social relationships and increasing parents' satisfaction, especially in the first year of a child's life. Women on maternity leave can feel

lonely and socially isolated. They often long to share their feelings with other mothers, pass on their experience with childcare and have informal conversations (Hjälmhult et al. 2014). The study of Hanna et al. (2002) and Kruske et al. (2004) proved that participation in parent meetings is an opportunity for developing social contacts, building up their confidence, and getting relevant information on parenthood and child health. Similar data can be found in the study of Glavin et al. (2016), who prove that participation in mothers groups improves the short-term psycho-social well-being of parents. They also connect it with the level of psychological anxiety of mothers regarding the quantity and quality of the social support they receive. They established three categories of the main support elements during the meetings: building a social network, where some relationships can be preserved for a long time, meetings with people in the same life situation and receiving certainty in motherhood by sharing experience with other mothers. Leahy Warren et al. (2012) emphasize the necessity of nurses and midwives to acknowledge the importance of social support in influencing the positive mental health and well-being of primiparas during the first postnatal months. The politics of healthcare should be adapted to it so that the development of social support is emphasized. According to Shorey et al. (2015), the psychological well-being of mothers, which comprises prenatal support, postnatal visits at home and the development of social support during parent meetings, depends on the continuity of care as well.

Hjälmhult et al. (2014) revealed 4 important elements which are brought to parents by their participation in parent groups. Firstly, it is a communication exercise in groups and an open sharing of feelings. Secondly, it helps in finding a place where they belong in society; being part of a group can provide a feeling of unity. Thirdly, the participation in a group supports parents in initiating and creating their own active approach in searching for solutions to the problems related to upbringing and child care. Fourthly, it creates the space for passing relevant information by medical professionals and, in this way, provides a good informational basis. Glavin et al. (2016) emphasise the salutogenic importance of parent groups and see them as a health

strengthening and life quality improving factor in the lives of their participants. They recommend the participation in these groups be offered to all mothers (parents) and medical professionals (ideally paediatric nurses) to manage them.

How to inform parents about the possibility of participating in the groups?

One of the practical issues of the functioning of parent groups is choosing the way to inform parents. Lefèvre et al. (2017) describe their experience in Sweden, where the custom is to inform all mothers/parents during the first preventative medical exam in the community centre or during the visiting service to newborns. Mothers are given a written notice with the information of places and times of such group meetings. Nurses try to motivate mothers to participate by informing them about the benefits that these group meetings provide and by giving them the outline of the topics and the course of the program.

Interest of mothers/parents in the participation

The question of whether parents are interested in group meetings is very complex, it is impossible to answer it explicitly because parents do not have such a possibility in the Czech Republic. The statistics from the article by Lefèvre et al. (2017) show that, despite all parents in Sweden with a first child being invited to participate in the meetings, only 49% of them did. The reason for such a low number can be, for example, drawbacks in the structure and management of such meetings, or insufficient information on the benefits of the participation in such meetings.

The role of community paediatric nurses as the managers of such groups

Parent groups exist in different forms in many countries. The initiators and the facilitators are usually paediatric nurses, hospitals or other medical facilities, or various parental organizations which support new families. The professional background does not only focus on support, strengthening the interaction between parents and children and providing quality information, but it also provides professional help to parents with

specific needs, such as teen mothers (Strange et al. 2016).

Hjälmhult et al. (2014) emphasize the benefits of employing paediatric nurses as managers of parental meetings and describe the importance of a clear structure and group programs. Most importantly, it is necessary to realize that such groups are not supposed to strengthen social relationships and provide entertainment. They are mainly supposed to support and help with various health, educational and other problems regarding child care. For this reason, it is necessary for experienced professionals to manage them and not the non-professional public.

The need for the education of the managers of group meetings

It is necessary for nurses in community care to gain quality education and always supplement their knowledge and improve their skills. Further professional growth is necessary for the nurses to be able to fulfil their role (Noonan et al. 2017). However, there are large differences in education. Glavin and Schaffer (2014) show the differences in education of the community nurses in the USA and Norway. In the USA, the nurses gain education during their bachelor's degree study program, where didactic and clinical educational strategies are used. In Norway, the education of community nurses is realized in the postgraduate period and it is necessary for them to have at least one year of practical experience. Throughout their practice, nurses have the possibility of attending courses focused on the issue of managing groups.

Lefèvre et al. (2017) published the results of the research study on the way the nurses felt about this role and whether their management skills had improved after having finished the course on managing groups. The course contained important topics, such as creating an environment of trust in a group, the theory of managing a group, development processes, training in coaching, supportive dialogue techniques, managing differences in a group or effective planning and projecting group meetings. Most respondents (96%) said that the course had fundamentally changed their approach to group management, they had acquired various skills for effective management and that their managing competences had been significantly

strengthened. With the clear explanation of tasks and their role as a group leader, their self-confidence and the motivation for further education had increased. Noonan et al. (2017) also emphasize the importance of professional training of nurses who provide support to the mothers who face psychological misbalance. The nurses themselves felt an increased confidence in their own ability to perform correctly after having finished the training.

The manner of managing group meetings

Managing groups is a very difficult task and detailed preparation is necessary. A nurse in the role of a facilitator is responsible for planning the meetings and making sure they run smoothly. The meetings must have a clear structure. Practice revealed that starting the meetings with a sharing of feelings in a circle (where the participants share their experiences) is probably the best. The next step could be a managed discussion on a previously set topic. An alternative can be watching films or reading from books, followed by a discussion (Hjälmhult et al. 2014). It is good to include the strategy of brainstorming, problem solving or role playing. It is always necessary to establish clear and realistic goals and use them to adjust applied strategies (Edgecombe and Hanna 2001). Lefèvre et al. (2017) describe actual experience with parent groups in Sweden. These groups are mostly composed of 6 to 8 couples and they meet approximately 8 to 10 times in the first postnatal year.

Frequently discussed topics

Group meeting programs are focused on the actual issues of motherhood and early parenthood. They discuss the issue of accepting the role of a parent, understanding their child, the characteristics of a child's life periods, breastfeeding and nutrition, sleeping, hygienic care, the principles of the safe manipulation with a newborn, preventing injuries, the basic symptoms of illnesses, vaccination, the principles of first aid, the principles of playing, communication support etc. The topics need to be chronologically ordered so that they are currently appropriate for the parents at the time of discussion. After discussing the basic topic, it is also possible

to share experiences and feelings regarding partnerships, sexual relationships after birth, how to bring childcare and employment into alignment, economical principles in the family etc. (Edgecombe and Hanna 2001).

The situation in the Czech Republic

Although the described parent groups are not found in the Czech Republic, there are other forms of them. One is the establishment of support groups for breastfeeding mothers. These groups arise under La Leche League National and they are based on the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), which responds to the insufficient support of mothers in all levels of care. Its goal is to support mothers in pregnancy, during birth and in the postnatal period. It also tries to bring changes in healthcare to ensure women have the ideal conditions in pregnancy, during birth and whilst breastfeeding. It assumes that traditional ways of support have been influenced by modernization, globalization and industrialization and it is necessary to find new ways of supporting mothers in the difficult period of motherhood (La Leche League National 2017).

Another form is the organization of prenatal courses, which are available in most Czech maternity hospitals. Nevertheless, there are differences in the content, quality and the type of professionals who manage the courses. The ideal case is when nurses and midwives working in the medical facility participate in the courses (Takáč et al. 2015).

An interesting alternative are the meetings of mothers and children in centres for mothers. These centres create opportunities for new friendships, exchanging information and sharing emotional experiences during the raising of a child. This way, a certain therapeutic community with clear rules is created (Langmeier and Krejčířová 2006).

CONCLUSION

The organization of parent meetings can be a convenient way to support young families. The experience of professionals from abroad can inspire us in our own activities in community

care. Supporting family health is an important state priority and an important task for health care providers.

Community paediatric nurses play an important role in supporting the health of families with children. Their task is to know the needs of the families in their community, support them, motivate them to have a healthy lifestyle, to be able to give advice, to encourage them, to prepare group meetings, to co-operate with other professionals and organizations in their environment, and to always supplement their education and try to promote the rights and aspirations of young parents regarding child care.

We assume that a greater participation of Czech paediatric nurses in community programs, programs of the centres for mothers, lectures, activities in public administration etc., would be very beneficial so that an emphasis is put on their indispensable role in health support and their place in the contemporary health care system.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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