

Reflection: Why Ethics?

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SOSC 2050

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1-14-24

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Ethics is a complex group of standards, morals, and practices that may be different for everyone. For myself this includes respect, honesty, compassion, professionalism, and equity. It is important that all people are treated with respect and given equal opportunities to their peers. As midwives we naturally want to nurture and care for others, this is the compassionate side of us. But we must be careful to keep our relationships professional as well. All lasting relationships, whether private or professional, must have a basis in honesty. Without honesty comes lack of trust and loss of respect. Nobody likes to be lied to. In a mutually respectful relationship midwives and clients can build trust in a professional manner, and work together to have the best outcomes possible.

Some professions are regulated by outside governing bodies. These organizations tell them how they can practice and what standards they must abide by. Midwives prefer to be self-regulated thereby maintaining their autonomy to practice as individuals. Because of political pressure from other professional organizations midwives have developed written ethical standards to practice by. Individuals who live and practice ethically should not need to be governed but will be able to regulate and control their own actions.

Professionals in any field of study often find others with similar training and beliefs as themselves. These groups of people strive to set themselves apart from others and create a unique identity. This professional identity can help others know who they are and what they believe. Midwives have a job and training that is similar to, but different from, other birth workers so it is vital that we have a professional identity that separates us from the other maternal healthcare fields.

Working relationships, such as those of client and midwife, require some set of guidelines to protect both sides from harm. Society in general influences some of these guidelines while others come about as a solution to a pattern of problems seen over time. The public sees these guidelines and

protections in place which causes them to have more trust in the profession, knowing that everyone involved is protected.

Midwifery in the United States has struggled for many years to be considered a professional maternal healthcare component. By placing ethical codes of conduct and educational requirements on midwives, the national organizations have begun to mature and be considered professional organizations among others in the country.

One ethical dilemma in my community involves the cost of midwifery care. As midwives we truly believe that everyone deserves a midwife. But this can be a financial burden for many families. In Alabama the Medicaid program does not cover midwifery care as it does in other states. To help solve this ethical dilemma some midwives have developed a sliding scale based on income or discounts or scholarships that are available to those in need. Other midwives have taken it a step further and have petitioned to become Medicaid providers and have the coverage expanded to include midwifery care. If this comes through it will be a great stride forward for equity and ethical treatment for our clients.

References

Foster, I. R. & Lasser, J. (2011). Professional ethics in midwifery practice. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, LLC.