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Book Reviews

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Birth Rites and Rights edited by Fatemeh Ebtehaj, Jonathan Herring, Martin H Johnson, Martin Richards

Hart 2011
ISBN-13: 978-1849461887
Publishers recommended price £45.00

Reviewed by
Lindsey Bowers

Find this book on Amazon

This academic book is a valuable resource for students, midwives and those with an interest birth and research. It was a fascinating and informative book to review and is written in such a manner that it is easy to locate further literature relating to the topic being discussed.

The book contains a collection of essays from the Cambridge Socio-Legal Group and is concerned with the varying circumstances, manner timing and experiences of birth. The essays come from a wide range of subjects including law, medicine, anthropology, history and sociology and examine birth from the perspective of mother, father, doctor and midwife. The book contains four parts, experiences and rites of birth, status and consequences of birth, after birth and timing of birth.

I very much enjoyed looking at the historical side of things and seeing how maternity care has changed over the decades. Each chapter is written by different authors from different fields. I did find a few chapters difficult to follow, however, for the most part I was captivated, and the scholarly thought behind

each topic has given me many ideas for my final disser tation. I would highly recommend the book for students, and for those looking at research.

Although this book is undeniably aimed at academics, I believe that anyone with an interest in birth will find it informative, educational and empowering in places and upsetting in others. The changing face of midwifery is demonstrated throughout and it contains important lessons with regards to this.

Revisiting Waterbirth: An Attitude to Care by Dianne Garland

Palgrave Macmillan 2010
ISBN-13: 978-0230273573
Publishers recommended price £21.99

Reviewed by
Ruth Weston

Find this book on Amazon

Ruth Weston is a water mother of four of her five children and the owner of Aquabirths birthing pool manufacturers for maternity units, and birth pool hire for parents. She is a birth activist and member of AIMS.

I have attended several of Dianne's waterbirth workshops and study days and found them excellent, informative and entertaining. I would recommend her study days to all.

I was therefore interested to read her book in the light of this and my experience of listening to the work of independent midwives specialising in waterbirth over the last 10 years. Notwithstanding a professional interest in the subject!

The book is a more in-depth, carefully worded, fully referenced version of her study day, without the entertaining anecdotes, waterbirth DVDs and activities. I think it makes an excellent baseline textbook for waterbirth, particularly in the UK health service but with relevance elsewhere.

Dianne's book is clearly written for the UK NHS and is immersed in its culture, its documents and guidelines. She provides all the quotations and references to all the documents anyone would want in persuading their sceptical unit to offer waterbirth. She provides outlines for audits and guidelines and provides detail on research across the world, pointing out some of its strengths and weaknesses. A lot of time is spent on dealing with the issues that arise in the UK in regard to waterbirth - the third stage in water, the potential (or lack of it) for water aspiration, infection control, record keeping and so on. This is very much a handbook for NHS midwives and so, whilst challenging some attitudes and practices and encouraging her readers to do the same, she writes reservedly and cautiously in contrast to other well-known waterbirth exponents. Never theless, there is a midwife's commitment underlying this book to provide with-woman care, to provide quality compassionate midwifery, advocating the masterly

inactivity and protection of the birthing space.

I think my key concerns are where she goes along with the NHS risk-averse culture too much. On page 34 she gives an example of a care pathway for a VBAC woman.

Here she is rightly advocating for women and demonstrating how, instead of just saying 'No, you can't' to a VBAC woman's request for a waterbirth, a fully risk assessed care pathway can be set up so that a woman may have the waterbirth she chooses. Such a guideline is provided as an example. The guideline, however, is very conservative in the light of much practice: including fourhourly CTG, scans and VEs and a dr y land birth rather than birth in water - although allowing women to refuse to leave and so have a waterbirth. There are these instances, then, where I can see how she is demonstrating how a sceptical medical culture can be overcome to give women choice but by the same token it may be useful to provide another example of a far more progressive and positive guideline for the same.

This is not a book for women wanting a waterbirth unless they like reading textbooks, but I think it is a very useful book for midwives, Maternity service Liaison Committee (MSLC) representatives and other birth workers: it provides all the information you need to argue your case or provide useful backup or information for your practice. However, I would advocate a visit to Dianne's study day where, with the freedom of the spoken word, she is able to give some excellent tips on how cultures and guidelines can be and have been challenged, and provide examples of different practice worldwide which challenge our norms.

Birthing Normally after a Caesarean or Two by Hèléne Vadeboncoeur

Fresh Heart Publishing; British edition 2011
ISBN-13: 978-1906619244
Publisher's recommended price £30.00

Reviewed by
Chloe Bayfield

Find this book on Amazon

Vadeboncoeur's book covers not only all things VBAC (vaginal birth after caesarean) related, but also all things caesarean related. It also touches on postnatal depression, breastfeeding, and bonding and has something to say about most of the birth world 'gurus'.

This book holds a lot of very useful information about VBACs and their surrounding issues. So much, in fact, that I think it would have been better as a VBAC series and not a single book. I would imagine I am this book's target audience; I am interested in all things VBAC and am always on the lookout for new material. I love to read and will happily devour most things. Sadly, reading this book became a bit of a chore.

I think the main problem is that this book cares too much. It has tried to cram too many burning issues in between two covers; they could happily have sat between three or four times as many. As a result, you feel like you have to wade through a lot of material and may end up missing a fair amount - something which I feel would have pained the author, as she is obviously very passionate about her subject matter.

Had she instead written three or four books - VBAC Stories, VBAC Studies and Statistics, VBAC Preparation and Caesarean Recovery, then it may have been an easier read.

As VBAC books go, this one is definitely worth reading as it does combine good research with some lovely birth stories and insightful advice. However, it is no way an easy read, which is a shame.

The Burden of Choice edited by Georgina Pearson

Dormouse Press 2013
ISBN-13: 978-0956946690
Publisher's recommended price £12.99

Reviewed by
Sally Kelly
Bereavement Midwife; West Middlesex University Hospital

Find this book on Amazon

Collected stories from parents facing a diagnosis of abnormalities during pregnancy

This book was compiled by a parent. She had experienced loss following diagnosis of fetal abnormality at her anomaly scan. It tells the stories of 31 families, all who faced making a choice that would affect their lives forever.

It takes the reader through the complex emotions of such a diagnosis and the choices that women and their families take based on what they have been told, their own beliefs and circumstances. It could be assumed that this book is directed solely at those facing such a diagnosis, but I would argue that health professionals involved in caring for such families will certainly benefit from reading about the raw and conflicting emotions experienced by these women and their families. The stories themselves differ in length, depth and detail, highlighting the diversity of each situation and the need to listen and not judge. This book is jargon free, which endears it to the reader and makes for 'literal' easy reading although the

content can be distressing at times.

The issue of how people can differ in their response to the grief process is visited. This is very helpful for parents to understand as there can be a perception that partners/relatives are being cold or insensitive, or even dismissive of the existence of the pregnancy/baby.

Would it be suitable for the masses? I think not as it is so subject specific; having said that, I do believe that society could benefit from understanding that decision making in the face of such a diagnosis is not easily reached and that the reality held within the book shows that life hangs on a thread and nothing is certain.

The information given does guide parents to organisations that have made a real difference to the grief process; this word of mouth recommendation will be comforting to families and will direct professionals to effective support networks. Some may feel that there needs to be more of a 'professional' tone to the book, but this would only ser ve to diminish the very essence of its purpose. It is not all depressing reading, and some families speak of where they are now and how they got there showing there can be hope without dismissing the existence of a previous child.

So who would benefit from this book? All midwives and health professionals working in the field of obstetrics, not only for insight but to guide parents to supportive information, and of course the families themselves. I admire the strength of these families in commiting their stories to paper and sharing their innermost feelings and experiences of a situation which none of us ever wish to be in. I have definitely gained insight from reading these stories and I hope this will help me, as a bereavement midwife, to temper my practice when supporting parents.

The Father's Home Birth Handbook by Leah Hazard

Pinter & Martin Ltd. 2011
ISBN-13: 978-1905177509
Publishers recommended price £8.99

Reviewed by
David Evans

Buy this book from AIMS
Find this book on Amazon

If you are a first-time homebirth dad then 'The Father's Home birth Handbook' is the book for you! It is a book that weaves the facts of homebirth with the experience of homebirth fathers through journalistic writing and anecdotal story telling.

The factual information is presented through a question and answer style of writing. Common questions

are posed - 'What about the father's role at a homebirth?' 'What about relaxation techniques such as hypnosis for childbirth?' 'What can I expect a normal homebirth to be like?' 'What are the normal stages of labour?' - and answered in an unbiased and factual style, supported with comprehensive references.

The author, Leah Hazard, has done her research, as each of the questions resonated with me (as an expectant homebirth dad) - found the author's responses very useful and reassuring. They either confirmed what I had already learned or gave very useful pointers for further research and discussion with my partner.

The handbook is presented in seven chapters:

The first two chapters set the scene: Are you mad? A homebirth? What's involved and how to get other people on-board - family, friends and medics.

The following three chapters explore the reality of a homebirth: who to invite, who will be there, pain and pain relief, and what to expect during a normal homebirth.

The penultimate chapter addresses concerns that most people would have regarding a homebirth - what to do if there is a complication, when to transfer to hospital, how to ensure the well being of mother and baby. The 'advice' is usefully framed as 'what can I do to help?'.

The final chapter quirkily asks 'what next?' assuming that you have just successfully homebirthed your child....

In summary, this book is a well-organised FAQ for homebirth fathers - a book that can be read cover-tocover or dipped into if specific questions arise. A recommended read.