



Midwifery Today 17-21 October 2018, Bad Wildbad, Germany

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By Marein Schmitthenner

From 17 to 21 October 2018, I was lucky enough to be joining last year's Midwifery Today Conference in Bad Wildbad, Germany. Midwives, doulas and other birth workers from across the globe come together once a year for this extraordinary chance to exchange knowledge, learn new skills and meet the most wonderful people from all over our beautiful planet, who share the same values and goals: to make the birthing world a safer, happier, more respectful and more compassionate place for all women, their babies and their families.

It was a pleasure to witness the amount of knowledge, wisdom, passion, skill and experience this conference brought together. Information sharing ranged from Spinning Babies, shoulder dystocia, malpositions and placenta science to massage, waterbirth, spirituality, rebozo for pregnancy and birth, self-care for birth workers and much, much more.

We had the privilege to hear and learn from the most wonderful midwives and activists, including Elizabeth Davis, Cornelia Enning, Tine Greve, Gail Hart, Michel Odent, Debra Pascali-Bonaro, Elaine Stillerman and Jennifer Walker, to name but a few. During lunch, between talks and in the evenings, there was plenty of opportunity to meet many of the extraordinary participants: midwives from the Faroe Islands, rebozo teachers from the Netherlands, birth activists from China, and many other passionate believers in positive, empowering birth.

Elizabeth Davis, American midwife and author of 'Heart and Hands', taught us many old midwifery skills, like the proper double hip squeeze, when to use it and when not to, aspects of holistic Continuity of Carer and plateaus in labour. She campaigns in the USA to include all this knowledge in the universities' curriculum for midwifery courses. She said she would be very happy to help achieve this in the UK as well, where it is missing.

The Double Hip Squeeze (to open the pelvic inlet)

- Have the mother get into hands and knees or an open knees/chest position.
- Position your hands with heels in the fleshy part of her buttocks, fingers pointing toward each other. You should not be on bone!
- With a contraction, press the heels of your hands into the buttocks, then push your hands towards each other.
- Use your back/shoulders to obtain sufficient pressure so that you feel the pelvis move.
- Between contractions, use rebozo or other measures to encourage relaxation of mother/movement in baby.



Gail Hart and Tine Greve talked about midwifery skills as old, traditional handicraft skills. One of their conclusions for breech births, for example, was to campaign for traditional breech midwifery skills to be included in the training of midwives and doctors, so that breeches will move out of the operating theatre and back into the birthing room. This, again, underlines the importance of talking to universities and course providers to add to their curriculum.

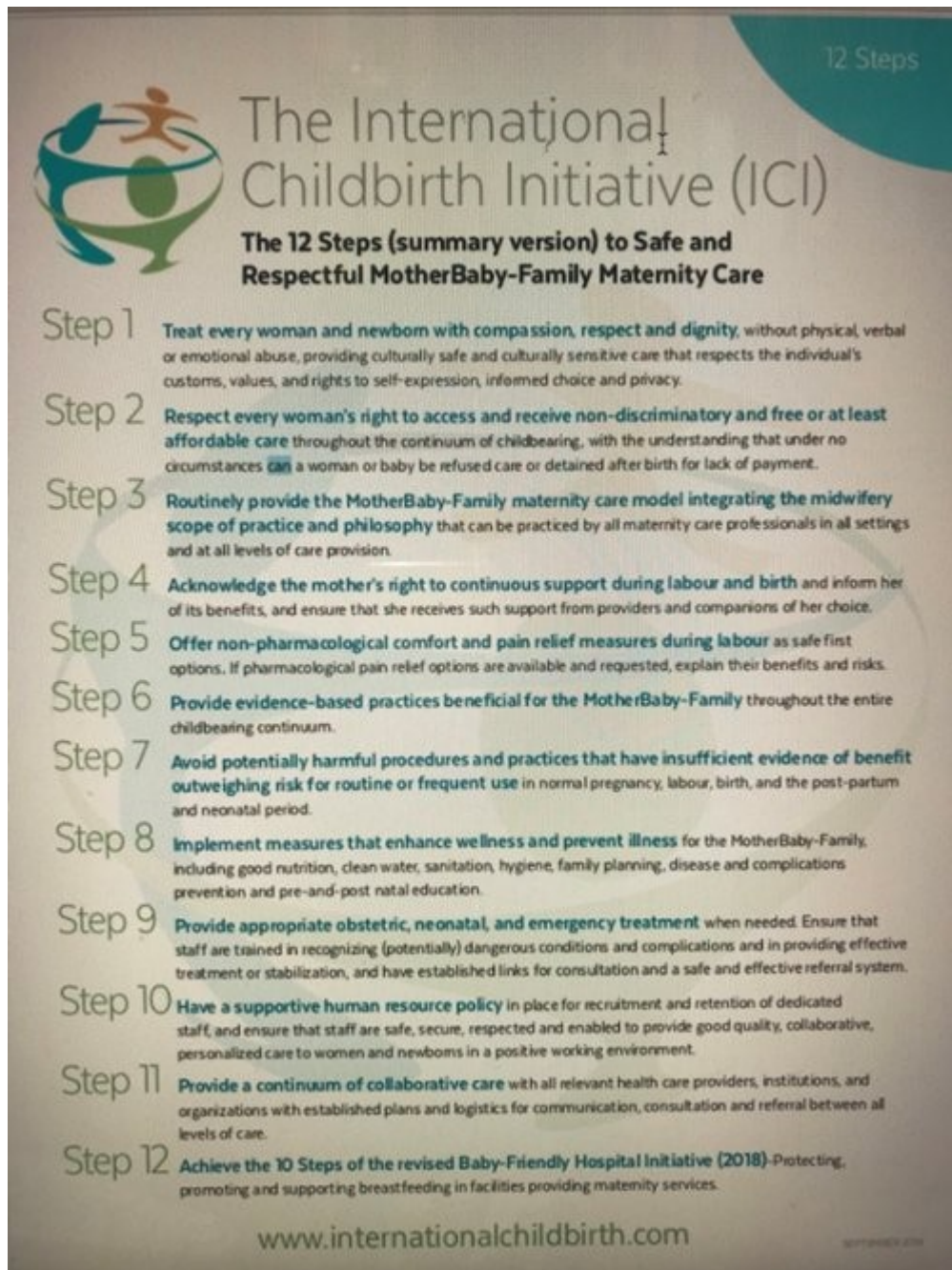
Another very inspirational speaker was Vijaya Krishnan from India. She is a professional midwife and Lamaze teacher. Vijaya has developed a unique, collaborative model of care in her Sanctum Natural Birth Centre in India, which is midwife-owned and midwife-led, but supported by an in-house medical backup team, a paediatrician and a gynaecologist, when required. They even have their own operating theatre. This model does not deprive the so-called 'high-risk' mothers from having midwifery-led care, as they do not have to be transported elsewhere in case of an emergency, but can be attended to safely in the same premises in the presence of their midwife. This birth centre model has a medical team on call for on-site emergencies (no hospital transfers) and run many different antenatal classes, but the model can be re-created anywhere. The Sanctum and the 'Village Birth Centre' in India do take midwives from around the world for work placements/work experiences.

And then there is China. Meng Xue (Jenny) is a midwife with a passion and another truly inspirational campaigner for women. She founded the China Midwifery Alliance and has introduced huge, rapid changes to the maternity services in hospitals in China. Her organisation trains obstetric nurses, midwives and obstetricians in all fields of natural birth, from philosophy, naturopathy and homeopathy

through to positions and physiology. It also provides antenatal classes to women and their partners covering all of the above. Jenny even trains the leading figures and managers of the hospitals. She and her organisation prove every day that change and training can start in one single hospital and spread from there by good example.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the International Childbirth Initiative.

It was launched just before the Conference in October. Their website is www.internationalchildbirth.com/ and it introduces 12 steps to safe and respectful maternity care. This list has been translated into various languages and is a very practical guide anyone can use to help improve maternity care in their area and beyond.



For me, the very last evening summed up what this conference was all about. A whole group of us met in the beautiful local spa where we sat naked in a hot pool (we were in Germany, after all) in all the glory of our female body shapes, chatted and laughed and then, magically, began to fill the colourfully tiled hallways and steamy rooms with song. The pure beauty and magic of these women's voices and their powerful and spiritual birth songs floating through the halls and over the pools opened my heart and soul to the point where I felt raw and vulnerable and strong and powerful, all at the same time. There was a sacredness in the air that should fill every birthing room in this world.

When everyone returned home the next day, to the airport, the train station or by car, the sacredness of birth and the intention to carry it out into the world was palpable (pun intended). Many wise women

were born that week, some got wiser, most shared their wisdom. They all carry true hope for our births, our babies, our mothers and fathers and therefore our world.