**Midwives’ experiences of father participation in maternity care at a large metropolitan hospital in Melbourne**

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Background & Aims: Father participation in maternity care has benefits for mothers, fathers and infants. Each year, more than 5,700 women of diverse cultural and language give birth at Sunshine Hospital. The aim was to examine midwives’ experiences of father attendance and engagement at Sunshine Hospital.

Methods This was a mixed-methods study. Midwives were invited to complete online or paper-based surveys, including fixed-response and open-ended questions, and/or to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Results: Forty midwives completed surveys; six participated in interviews. Of the survey respondents, 27 (67.5%) reported working in antenatal clinics, 36 (90%) in birthing, 30 (87.5%) on postnatal wards and 14 (35%) doing home visits. Midwives estimated that 90% of fathers are present during birthing and postnatal wards, while 76% are present during home visits and 52% attend antenatal appointments. The most commonly perceived factors preventing fathers from attending were cultural factors and work and family commitments. In the interviews, midwives reported benefits to having fathers present, including support and advocacy for mothers, education for fathers and bonding with infants. However, they highlighted difficulties with asking women about sensitive issues (eg domestic violence) if fathers are present. Midwives identified several barriers to father attendance and participation, including individual factors (fathers sometimes being disengaged and distracted by mobile phones), cultural factors (pregnancy and birth is “women’s work”) and health service factors (lack of after-hours appointments and antenatal education classes).

Conclusions & Implications: Offering antenatal clinics and home visits outside normal business hours may improve father attendance. Training and support for midwives may assist them with strategies to engage fathers in conversation and educate mothers and fathers about the importance of father involvement. In consultation with some of the commonly represented cultural groups at Sunshine, discussion should be encouraged regarding respecting cultural traditions while providing family-friendly care.