

Overcoming Barriers to Skilled Midwifery Care: The Role of Nurse Practitioner Midwives in India

Dear Editor,

Women's and newborns' survival depends on skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth. India's maternal mortality rate is 97 per 100,000 live births, and the neonatal mortality rate is 20 per 1,000 live births.^[1] Nurse practitioner midwives (NPMs) provide care to women throughout their lives, focusing on pregnancy, childbirth, and reproductive health. The NPM program in India, initiated in 2019, is an 18-month government initiative to enhance maternal healthcare by creating a professional midwifery workforce.^[2] This initiative addresses previous approaches where midwifery was merged with general nursing, leading to unclear roles and underutilized midwifery skills.^[3] Autonomous midwifery practice can prevent 41% of maternal deaths, 39% of neonatal deaths, and 26% of stillbirths by 2035.^[4]

Implementing and scaling the NPM program across healthcare settings is challenging. Research shows that limited resources and infrastructure in rural areas pose obstacles.^[5] Cultural barriers and traditional practices may conflict with evidence-based approaches, necessitating community engagement. Healthcare provider resistance could hinder the integration of new practices. These challenges highlight that success depends on strategic actions to address systemic barriers.

To address these challenges and maximize the NPM's impact, we recommend key actions for policymakers. First, allocate funding for NPM training and equipment. Second, develop clear career pathways and incentives for NPMs to work in underserved areas to attract skilled practitioners where needed. Third, integrate NPMs into healthcare systems and foster collaboration with other providers to enhance care delivery. Finally, implementing monitoring systems to track NPM deliveries and care metrics. While a formal cost-effectiveness analysis for India is pending, midwifery's potential to avert deaths and disabilities represents a highly cost-effective investment.^[4]

In conclusion, implementing the NPM program is crucial for achieving India's maternal and neonatal health goals. This shifts from the previous model of care by nurses with integrated midwifery training and physicians, which failed to meet national targets. By following these recommendations, we can harness NPM's potential to improve maternal and newborn health nationwide. We must act to expand these programs.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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