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MIDWIFERY TRAINED REGISTERED NURSES' ROLE IN INTRA AND POST NATAL UNITS IN TERTIARY CARE HOSPITALS IN THE WESTERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA: HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS

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In many developing countries, specifically South Asian and Sub Saharan African settings, maternity care providers involved in intra natal and postnatal care lack defined tasks, roles, and responsibilities. In Sri Lanka, members of the maternity care team, including midwifery trained Registered Nurses (MTRNs) lack clearly demarcated professional boundaries with potential for interprofessional conflicts which can threaten the safety of the mother and the baby. The aim of this study was to understand different health professionals' perceptions of the MTRNs role in intra-natal and postnatal settings. A descriptive qualitative study using focus group discussions was conducted in the Western province. Six focus groups were conducted with 22 MTRNs, 16 midwives, and 07 Registered Nurses altogether 45 participants. Data were analyzed using qualitative manifest content analysis method. The analysis comprised of five main categories: initial care in the labor room (LR), pre-delivery care in the LR, care at the delivery, postpartum care in the LR and postpartum care in the postnatal unit and respective sub categories. There were consensuses as well as disagreements regarding the MTRN's tasks and responsibilities. The strongest disagreements showed in tasks and responsibilities under the category of care at delivery. Performing the delivery was the most contentious task in the LR as midwives felt this to be their sole responsibility and not a duty of MTRNs. Different professional categories viewed MTRN's tasks differently which manifests her role as complex and unclear. Although most MTRNs' tasks overlapped with other health care professionals of the maternity care team, the particularly high overlap regarding delivery with midwives could lead and contribute to conflicts among health care professionals performing the delivery. For promotion of inter professional collaboration, which is a prerequisite for high quality and safe maternity care delivery, clearly demarcated professional boundaries for MTRNs through guidelines issued by the ministry of Health to clarify MTRN's role is therefore recommended.

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