

Polish midwives and lactation care – development opportunities

Ścieżka rozwoju położnej w dziedzinie laktacji w Polsce

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STRESZCZENIE

ŚCIEŻKA ROZWOJU POŁOŻNEJ W DZIEDZINIE LAKTACJI W POLSCE

Wprowadzenie. Poradnictwo laktacyjne oraz promocja karmienia piersią to nieodłączne zadania położnej. Karmienie naturalne może stwarzać liczne problemy przez co stałe aktualizowanie oraz poszerzanie wiedzy i kompetencji położnych w kwestii laktacji jest wpisane w rolę położnej. Stanowić może również interesującą ścieżkę kariery.

Cel pracy. Celem pracy jest przedstawienie możliwości rozwoju zawodowego położnej w dziedzinie laktacji w Polsce w ramach kształcenia podyplomowego.

Podsumowanie. Kurs specjalistyczny Centrum Kształcenia Podyplomowego Pielęgniarek i Położnych „Edukacja i Wsparcie Kobiety w Okresie Laktacji” umożliwia pracę na stanowisku edukatora do spraw laktacji. Kurs dokształcający Centrum Nauki o Laktacji „Problemy w laktacji” – kończy się uzyskaniem tytułu Certyfikowanego Doradcy Laktacyjnego potwierdzającego, nabycie wiedzy i umiejętności koniecznych do prowadzenia specjalistycznego poradnictwa laktacyjnego. Międzynarodowy egzamin uprawniający do uzyskania tytułu Międzynarodowego Dyplomowanego Konsultanta Laktacyjnego – uzyskanie certyfikatu uprawnia do pracy w dziedzinie laktacji na całym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe:

położna, laktacja, karmienie piersią, rozwój

ABSTRACT

POLISH MIDWIVES AND LACTATION CARE – DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction. Providing lactation care and promoting breastfeeding are indispensable tasks of a midwife. Natural feeding can create numerous problems, which means that the constant updating and expanding knowledge and competence of midwives in the matter of lactation is included in the role of a midwife. It can also be an interesting career path.

Aim. The aim of the work is to present the opportunities for professional development of a midwife in the field of lactation in Poland as part of postgraduate education.

Conclusions. Lactation Educator – a specialist course organised by the Centre for Postgraduate Training of Nurses and Midwives “Education and Support of Women in Lactation” which enables to work as a lactation educator. Certified Lactation Consultant – a course organized by the Lactation Science Centre “Problems in lactation”. The title of Certified Lactation Consultant confirms that the midwife has acquired the appropriate knowledge and skills to professionally and responsibly conduct specialist lactation counselling. International Certified Breastfeeding Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) – IBCLC has the appropriate knowledge of and skills in supporting nursing women, confirmed by an international examination entitled to work in the field of lactation worldwide.

Key words:

midwife, lactation, breastfeeding, development

INTRODUCTION

As recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), children should be exclusively breastfed up to 6 months of age. Then continue breastfeeding with proper supplement of meals, according to pediatric standards for extending the diet, up to about 2 years of age or longer. The World Health Assembly has developed a comprehensive nutrition implementation plan for mothers, infants, and young children, setting out six global nutritional targets for 2025. One is to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding to support women and optimize the chances of natural feeding as directed. The World Health Organization emphasizes the role of midwives in creating conditions for protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding worldwide [1]. Natural feeding in accordance with the standard of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the European Society for Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) is a recommended and exemplary method of feeding infants and young children, which is why it is so important to respect the conditions of correct lactation and develop skills for lactation care at the highest level [2].

AIM

The aim of the following review is to describe the midwife's possibilities of professional development in the field of lactation care in Poland.

According to the Lactation Management Curriculum Guide (LMCG), three levels of lactation health care training are picked out.

- Level I basic – includes the scientific basis, clinical aspect, and social context of breastfeeding. This level should be ensured in the framework of pregraduate education in medical studies, where individual issues should be discussed on the basis of existing curricula. It is intended for health professionals who do not intend to specialise in perinatal care
- Level II general – includes practical knowledge and skills to provide routine advice and instruction, allowing the proper start and continuation of the lactation process and clinical management of the most common lactation problems, together with referral to a lactation specialist. It is designed for all doctors, midwives, nurses, dietitians specializing in aspects of perinatal care, and work with the mother and children during lactation. Level II in particular involves midwives, as well as doctors and nurses specializing in neonatology, pediatrics, obstetrics, and family medicine. Level of knowledge corresponding to stage II may be provided in pregraduate or postgraduate education.
- Level III specialist – includes interdisciplinary knowledge and practical skills to provide specialist lactation advice. It allows you to solve all, even the most complex, lactation problems and implement clinical management in accordance with current protocols. It refers to lactation consultants. It may apply to health professionals who have reached the second level of education but have specialized in one or two narrower areas of

lactation. The 3rd level in full thematic scope must be obtained by lecturers and authors of breastfeeding curricula. Level III is intended for midwives, nurses, doctors, dietitians who intend to specialize in lactation counselling [3].

In accordance with the standard of education for the first-degree study profession, the future midwife carries out not less than 4720 hours of classes scheduled during the 6 semesters. Practical classes and apprenticeships occur under simulated conditions and on the basis of the infrastructure of medical practitioners. Midwifery students have the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in the field of lactation during practical classes and apprenticeships in maternity units, delivery rooms, neonatal wards, pediatric wards (infant, neonatal pathology), in primary care offices and during postpartum visits and in specialized clinics – lactation clinics.

The detailed results of lactation education include:

- knowledge of lactation physiology and discussing the lactation process,
- knowledge of the risk factors for failure in breastfeeding
- conducting lactation counselling during pregnancy,
- identifying lactation problems and taking preventive action in this area,
- conducting educational activities related to the promotion of natural feeding and solving lactation problems,
- planning the diet in terms of quantity and quality, including knowledge of dietary recommendations for women during lactation.

The standard of education for second-degree midwifery includes no less than 1300 hours of classes planned during the 4 semesters. Practical classes and apprenticeships occur under simulated conditions and on the basis of the infrastructure of medical practitioners, including lactation clinics, as for the course of first-degree studies.

The detailed results of lactation education include:

- development and implementation of health education programs, including lactation counselling,
- knowledge of the guidelines and programs of organizations promoting breastfeeding in Poland and other countries and their laws in this field,
- knowledge of lactation and factors affecting the lactation process,
- ability to deal with difficult situations in lactation, relactation and induced lactation,
- conducting lactation education activities, including specialized care of the woman and her child, irrespective of their clinical condition and maturity, before and during breastfeeding and in the case of induced lactation and lactation,
- knowledge of medicines, drugs, and infectious diseases effects on lactation and the possibility of breastfeeding [4].

The aim of this work is to present the opportunities for the development of midwives in the field of lactation in Poland. One of the tasks of the midwife is to provide lactation assistance and promote breastfeeding. In accordance

with the applicable Standard of Perinatal Care, midwives are obliged to ensure practical and theoretical preparation of pregnant women for lactation [5]. However, natural feeding can create numerous problems, both on the part of the child and the mother [2]. That is why, it is vital for midwives to update and expand their knowledge and competence in terms of lactation. It can also be an interesting career path.

Specialist course „Education and support of women during lactation”

A specialist course is a type of education, according to the Act of 15 July 2011. The professions of nurse and midwife (Journal of Laws No. 174, item 1039, as amended) aim to acquire the midwife's knowledge and skills to perform certain professional activities in the provision of care, preventive, diagnostic, therapeutic or rehabilitation services [6].

The course of specialist training organized by the Centre for Postgraduate Training of Nurses and Midwives „Education and support of women during lactation” allows you to work as a lactation educator. The lactation educator includes specialized care of the woman and her child during the preparation, start, and duration of breastfeeding. The program is intended for midwives.

The total number of hours spent on the implementation of the training program is 62 teaching hours: theoretical classes – 34 hours, including 7 hours of workshop classes, and practical classes – 28 hours. The curriculum includes three modules.

- Module I – Breastfeeding as a medical, social, and economic issue.
- Module II – Education, support and communication with the nursing mother.
- Module III – The most common problems during breastfeeding and ways to solve them.

The specialist course „Education and support of women during lactation” is completed with a theoretical and/or practical examination in front of the examination board appointed by the organizer of postgraduate education. The theoretical exam consists of test questions, case resolution, and diagnosis from photos or videos. The practical examination consists of conducting a demonstration education of a randomly selected nursing mother, and a case discussion [7].

Certified Lactation Consultant (CDL)

The course of further education in the framework of postgraduate education organized by the Centre for The Study of Lactation „Problems during lactation” allows the midwife to earn the title of Certified Lactation Consultant. It confirms that the midwife has acquired the appropriate knowledge and skills to professionally and responsibly conduct specialist lactation counselling. These midwives are prepared to work in lactation clinics, organize lactation care, develop procedures, and educate staff in their work units at I, II, and III reference level. The content presented during the course goes far beyond the knowledge gained during pregraduate and postgraduate education

during specialization in family nursing, pediatrics, neonatology, gynecology and obstetrics, family medicine, public health, health promotion and health education. The conditions for obtaining the certificate are fulfilling the entry requirements according to CDL standards, which involve:

- the course „Problems during lactation”,
- implementation and passing of a minimum 20 hours of supervised practice,
- 500 hours of individual practice with documentation of directly administered lactation advice,
- obtaining a positive result of the theoretical and practical examination.

Certified Lactation Consultant can:

- conduct medical interviews with the mother, observe and assess the child's condition, perform breast examination, observe and evaluate the act of breastfeeding,
- identify causes and differentiate lactation problems, make a diagnosis and give appropriate lactation recommendations, and apply appropriate therapeutic procedures,
- teach the correct technique of breastfeeding,
- provide assistance and support during the peripartum period and during breastfeeding,
- keep documentation of lactation advice: observation card, lactation recommendations, propose therapeutic procedures in writing, write a referral to a specialist,
- select the pumping equipment and choose the appropriate method of breast milk feeding,
- cooperate in therapy with other people caring for the mother: doctors, midwives, nurses, physiotherapists, and psychologists for patient safety.

The title of Certified Lactation Consultant (CDL) is given by the Board of the Centre for The Study of Lactation (Centrum Nauki o Laktacji) after an analysis of the course of education and exam results confirming the ability to provide specialized lactation advice [8].

International Breastfeeding Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC)

The International Breastfeeding Certified Lactation Consultant has the appropriate knowledge and skills in supporting lactating women, confirmed by an international exam after which a certificate is received – which allows to work worldwide. The IBCLC certification confirms that the practicing consultant has the required knowledge to promote and educate on the topic of breastfeeding as an essential element of public health in the world, to provide leadership to the public – from community to legislators, promoting a breastfeeding-friendly environment for families.

The topics of IBCLCs knowledge are divided into thematic blocks, such as:

- development and nutrition,
- physiology and endocrinology,
- pathology, pharmacology and toxicology,
- psychology, sociology and anthropology,
- techniques
- clinical skills [9].

The requirements for the IBCLC exam are: medical education, lactation education, clinical experience in lactation care, and compliance with the Code of Professional Conduct for IBCLCs. Candidates must follow one of the three exam paths to take the IBCLC exam.

1. Examination Path 1: Recognized health professionals and recognized breastfeeding support advisers.

It provides structured training programs for counselors, including comprehensive education in breastfeeding and lactation management. Minimum required:

- 90 hours of lactation training during the 5 years preceding the application for examination,
- 1000 hours of clinical practice in lactation care under appropriate supervision during the 5 years preceding the application for the examination.

Places of practice: hospital, birth center, environmental clinic, clinic/lactation clinic, first-contact doctor clinic.

2. Examination Path 2: Approved academic lactation programs.

Candidates must complete a comprehensive university lactation program that is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs or another accreditation institution with equivalent accreditation standards for academic lactation programs. Minimum required:

- 90 hours of lactation training during the 5 years preceding the application for examination,
- 300 hours of directly supervised clinical practice in lactation care during the 5 years preceding the application for examination,

3. Exam Path 3: Mentoring with IBCLC Consultant.

An IBCLC consultant mentoring is a structured, specific relationship between the candidate and the IBCLC Consultant. Minimum required:


- 90 hours of lactation training during the 5 years immediately preceding the application for examination,
- 500 hours of directly supervised lactation clinical practice within 5 years immediately preceding the application for the IBCLC examination [10].

CONCLUSIONS

The role of a midwife, as the WHO points out, is crucial for ensuring the conditions for proper lactation and nutrition of children around the world. Midwife support for a nursing mother is an indispensable element in mother and newborn care. The possibilities presented by this work for the development of midwives in the field of lactation in Poland shows the importance of mastering an extensive knowledge of lactation and optimizing the skills needed in clinical practice. Updating and broadening the expertise and competences of midwives in lactation is an important element from the perspective of statutory professional development, valued in the labor market. It can also provide an interesting career path and give the opportunity to evolve in conducting a private midwifery practice with a lactation clinic.

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