

A SYMPOSIUM

Ante and Postnatal Prophylactic Education Reassessed

Introduction

By Rosemary Harte, M.C.S.P.

Overseas, it has been the custom recently to conduct symposia on the subject of Training For Childbirth, which has resulted in experimentation, statistics, postulated theories and lively debate. In such an atmosphere of contribution and professional interaction, deeper levels of awareness and understanding are made possible. In our country, however, in spite of comparable competence, there has not been the same exchange of ideas between professional authorities and practitioners. Considering our early realisation of the import, and practice of this work, it is disappointing that we have not materially contributed in this field.

The intention of this symposium, comprising contributions by members of interrelated professions and sciences, is to stimulate debate and thought locally. It is hoped that its continuance in subsequent editions of the *Journal* will present a reasonably wide spectrum of opinion on the subject of ante- and postnatal prophylaxis and education, with the possible advancement of some new light on current thought.

Although I shall be contributing a paper myself in a later issue, I would like, at the outset of the symposium, to present two problems for thought and discussion, which in my opinion deeply concern the future quality and advancement of our work. These are the status quo of those teaching ante- and postnatal education, and the limited vision of our work.

Does the physiotherapist trained today completely fulfil the demands made on her by this work, and can we, in fact, claim that it is a training to which physiotherapists alone enjoy a Divine Right? If we are to act wisely and with forethought, not only concerning our own involvement, but in answer to those people already actively and effectively engaged in this work, who are not physiotherapists, this matter demands a lot of honest thought. We have always considered it a specialised branch of physiotherapy, but we have only to remember some of the best known exponents overseas to realise that this is not necessarily so. These latter have founded in Britain, The National Childbirth

Trust (*persona grata* with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy). They are concerned that at present there is no professional training which specifically equips a woman for antenatal teaching, since there is such an overlap between the physiological, psychological and sociological aspects. In this country the tendency has been for physiotherapists to handle this work in conjunction with the medical profession. Of late, people of other disciplines and with a natural affinity for the work are playing an increasingly active part. I agree with Sheila Kitzinger¹ when she says "One can only hope . . . that in the near future a system of training and certification for antenatal teachers, both for those who are already midwives or physiotherapists, and for those who are now lay teachers, will be evolved. Such a course is urgently required if standards are to be raised".

Anent the limited vision of our work, there is clearly a need for closer co-operation between the practising professions if vital information is to be fed through to, and from, those concerned in teaching our work. For instance, a greater understanding of the psychological problems of pregnancy, parturition and the puerperium is needed than that offered by a physiotherapy training; more information is essential concerning an excessive secretion of relaxing resulting in pelvic arthropathy and subsequent backache; we tend to consider antenatal education, labour and postnatal recovery as an isolated event in the life of a woman rather than reviewing it as an integral part of her total health. Very little attention is given to the adolescent and menopausal woman in the widest sense of ante- and postnatal prophylaxis. Properly systemised scientific methods should replace the conjectural tendency of some of the available writings if we are to get the childbearing period into a broader perspective in the greater fabric of The Study of Woman.

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1. "An approach to antenatal teaching." Sheila Kitzinger. Issued by the National Childbirth Trust. 1968.