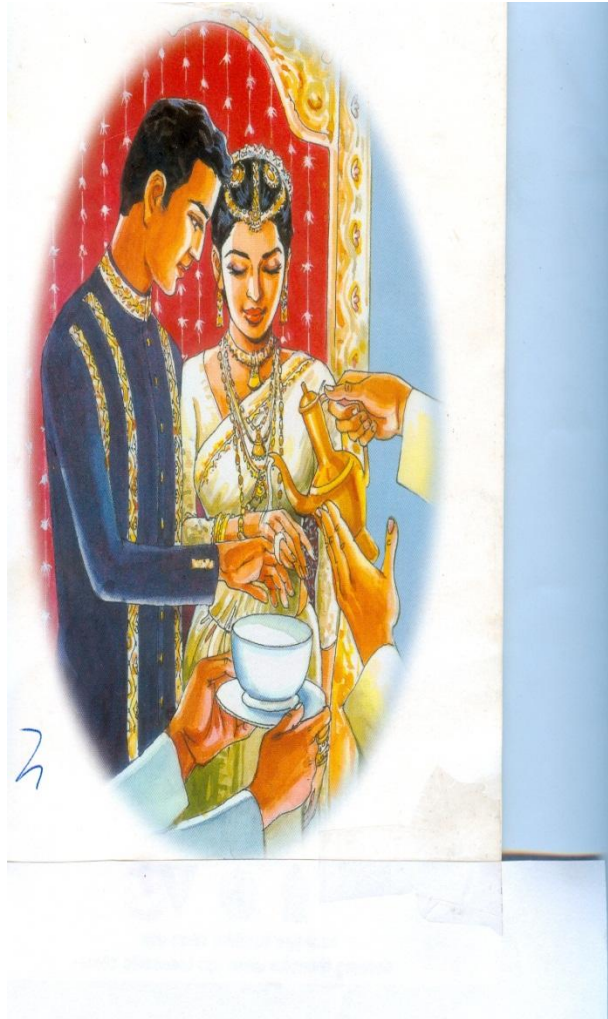


Hand book to guide health staff on Health Care for Newly Wedded



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Ministry of Health – Sri Lanka

foreword

Sri Lanka has received many commendations for the success achieved in the field of Maternal and Child Health. The efforts of the Ministry of Health over many years to realize the concept of safe motherhood have now borne fruits due to the dedicated services of our healthcare staff. Now we need to move forward.

This is the reason why we focused our attention on a new component of health services for newly married couples, “Healthcare for Newly Wedded”. Now we hope to commence our healthcare for a woman even before she conceives. Therefore we extend our Maternal and Child Health Services to encompass newly married men & women as they start their life together as husband and wife. We believe that these efforts would achieve our objective to have a healthy father, mother and a baby.

This book is expected to provide guidance to our health staff throughout the country who will join us to implement our new programme for newly married couples.

We wish to express our respectful gratitude to all the medical consultants, resource persons and those who helped to coordinate the process to compile and publish this guide.

We wish that our efforts to provide proper guidance and care to couples as they enter their married life will be a great success.

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2009

“Healthcare for Newly Wedded”

I

Introduction

At present “Safe Motherhood” concept has become an important component of Maternal and Child Health Services in Sri Lanka. In order to expand Maternal & Child Health Services provided to the people we have taken action to introduce a new health component named “Healthcare for Newly Wedded”

There is no doubt that this new service package “Healthcare for Newly Wedded” would lay a strong foundation to promote the happiness and expectations of newly married couples to last throughout their life.

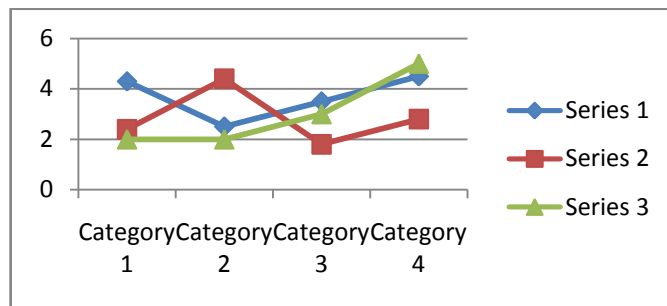
The main objective of this guide is to help the health staff to create awareness among the couples from the time they enter married life on diverse subjects such as sexuality, family wellbeing, healthcare, nutrition, conception, family planning, reproductive health problems, disease identification and seeking treatment.

We hope that the content of this booklet will be useful to the public health staff to create awareness among their service recipients.

Maternal Mortality Ratio

In 1935 the Maternal Mortality Ratio in Sri Lanka was 27 per 1000 live births. By 1945 this dropped to 14/1000 live births. This was due to several factors such as reduction of maternal deaths caused by malaria by establishing the Malaria Control Programme, free health services to all and improving the literacy rate of women in Sri Lanka by introducing free education. The maternal mortality was brought down further to 5 deaths per 1000 live births by 1950.

1930-1996

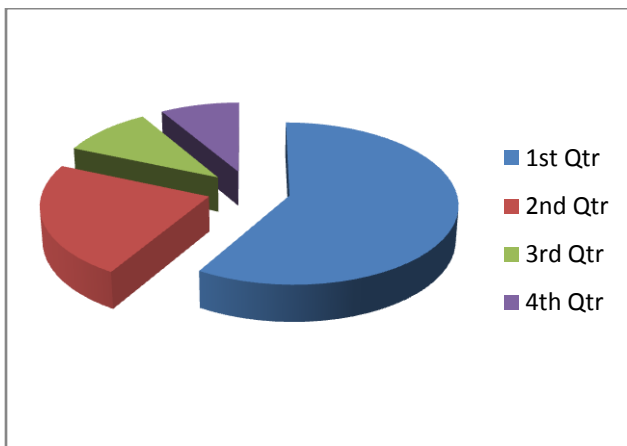


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MMR Graph

The “Primary Health Care” concept introduced in 1978 which had special emphasis on maternal and child health with appropriate strategies for service improvement, and the “Safe Motherhood” concept introduced in 1987 targeting improvement of maternal care, helped to bring down the Maternal Mortality Ratio in Sri Lanka to 61/per hundred thousand live births in 1994 and 38/hundred thousand live births in 2004.

In our efforts to further reduce maternal deaths, one fact we realized is that women are not aware of the large number of diseases which can be diagnosed and treated easily before pregnancy to avoid complications in the mother and the baby.



(insert pie chart)

By early diagnosis of heart diseases, anaemia, liver diseases etc. complications which may occur during pregnancy could be prevented or even minimized. Therefore it is important to diagnose such diseases among couples who have not achieved parenthood yet and treat them early so that their reproductive health could be promoted to ensure a safe pregnancy.

“Healthcare for Newly Wedded” programme has the following 4 objectives.

- (1) To improve the knowledge and awareness of the couple on Reproductive Health and create conducive behavioural changes.
- (2) To improve the health status of all young women maximally by referring them to the “Health Care for Newly Wedded” programme before they get pregnant.
- (3) To identify health problems of husband and wife and correct or minimize them before they achieve parenthood.
- (4) To reduce complications during pregnancy and delivery and prevent the risk posed on the mother and baby. To prevent or minimize maternal and infant mortality by these.

Steps to be implemented to achieve the above objectives.

- ❖ Public Health Midwives (PHMs) to identify all the newly married couples (those who are newly registered in the eligible couples register or already registered couples who are not yet parents) in her area.
- ❖ Using the check list PHMs to collect information and identify problems.
- ❖ To list the problems according to priority.
- ❖ To provide guidance & assistance to solve the identified problems.
- ❖ To give rubella immunization to those who have not been immunized and to give folic acid to all the women who are awaiting pregnancy.
- ❖ To provide knowledge & create awareness among all the newly married couples on current topics and encourage a behavioural change so as to help them to lead a happy & successful married life.
- ❖ To subject all newly married couples to a medical checkup.
- ❖ To provide, counseling/instructions/treatment to solve problems identified. Where necessary refer for specialists’ advice or treatment.
- ❖ Follow up of all the couples with identified problems.

- ❖ To participate newly married couples in workshops organized by the field & hospital staff and improve their knowledge and awareness on the following topics.
 - ❖ To make them understand the responsibilities and duties towards each other for their wellbeing and happiness.

Topics to improve knowledge and awareness of couples

- Sexuality and reproductive health, nutrition, and how to make them identify disease conditions related to these and seek prompt treatment.
- The responsibilities of the newly married couple towards each other to ensure their wellbeing.
- The importance of mutual exchange of ideas, controlling arrogance and mental stress and help them to understand each other.
- Importance of avoiding harmful practices such as smoking, alcohol consumption and help them to change behavior
- The importance of preventing domestic and the favourable influence that can have on the couple, children and other members of the family.
- The importance of optimal spacing of pregnancies and preventing unwanted pregnancies (planned parenthood)
- The importance & the value of parenthood and to prepare for it.

01. Sexuality

A famous psychologist “Sigmund Proid” has stated that as much as nutrition, sexual pleasure is also very important to human life. Sexuality is an activity which determines personality and individuality of human beings. In Sri Lanka men & women have the pleasure of sex within married life. Therefore one special objective of a couple planning to get married is to enjoy the extreme pleasure of their sexual relationship.

Sexuality is a broader concept which is not limited to sexual intercourse only. This concept which is closely linked to life from childhood to old age keeps on changing from time to time and according to culture. Sexual health includes knowledge & attitudes on sexual matters, behavior & practices, sexual activity & inactivity, sexual thoughts, feelings, positions, imaginations, closeness and sexual intercourse.

Sexuality is shaped according to cultural, social and religious norms while certain myths, beliefs and ideologies attached to these hinder achievement of maximum sexual pleasure and satisfaction.

Sexual relationship is not an activity limited to reproduction only. It is considered as a special deep communication between two persons. A successful sexual relationship ensures very close feelings, desires and deep satisfaction while an unsuccessful sexual relationship shatters all expectations causing deep sorrow and mental stress. One of the main objectives of the sexual act is to enjoy sexual satisfaction maximally and to provide the same to the spouse too. It is important to understand that this is a right and a responsibility of both partners.

Some reasons for problems related to sexual relationship.

- ❖ Lack of unity and friendliness in the married life.
- ❖ Experience of marital problems between parents during their childhood.

- ❖ Experience of being subjected to sexual abuse.
- ❖ Disparities in the desire for sex and in the process of sexual activity.
- ❖ Extra marital relationships
- ❖ Addiction to alcohol & drugs

It is very important for a couple who expects to lead a successful family life to have a good understanding about sexuality, structure of male & female reproductive organs and the physical and mental changes that take place during sexual activity.

Sexual relationship

There are 4 overlapping stages in the process of sexual act between a man and a woman.

These stages are

1. Arousal
2. Plateau
3. Orgasm
4. Resolution

From the stage of sexual arousal to the stage of orgasm, the pulse rate, blood pressure, respiration, tension of body muscles gradually increase and come back to normal after orgasm.

Usually most of the couples engage in foreplay before sexual intercourse. In foreplay there are various sex related behaviours including touching, caressing, prattling, touching breasts and sex organs, sometimes oral sex and mutual auto-erotism to arouse sexual desire. This foreplay may last 5-10 minutes or even 30-45 minutes. This will increase the sexual desire of a woman and help reduce the time taken for orgasm.

Stage of Arousal

The indication that the woman & the man have reached the stage of arousal :

- ❖ Penile erection & hardening- in the man
- ❖ Vaginal wetness & lubrication- in the woman

These are the signs which show that the couple is ready to have sexual intercourse. With the increase in desire for intercourse the erect penis approaches the vagina & is guided into the vaginal canal making further progression of the act.

Plateau

This is stage closest to orgasm. The penis enlarges and hardens further and the lower part of the vagina tightens and holds the penis tight. This stage is known as **orgasmic plateau**. Then the woman's nipples get stimulated and the clitoris flattens. Increase in pulse rate, respiratory rate & blood pressure occurs in both partners.

Sexual desire reaches the climax and the muscles of the penis and vagina contract rhythmically. With maximum sexual feelings and mental satisfaction there is awakening of the whole body and the man ejaculates seminal fluid into the vagina. In the case of a woman no such ejaculation takes place. But women describe their experience at orgasm as "extremely warm" "very exciting" "absolutely fine" "all relieved" etc.

With the end of orgasm comes the stage of "resolution". The pulse rate, respiratory rate & blood pressure come back to normal in both partners. Sometimes there may be mild sweating in the body. At the end of this most men feel sleepy but women tend to stay awake. This stage is a good opportunity for the couple to stay closer and murmur to each other and strengthen their bonding further.

Following are a few special facts associated with sexual relationship

- (1) The thoughts about sexual relationship and satisfaction among men & women seem to be different. Some women although not satisfied by the process of sexual intercourse enjoy the act by satisfying their partner. This should not be considered as a short coming or a failure of the act. It is because orgasm in women is not considered as a measure of their sexual pleasure or satisfaction.
- (2) It should be understood that the time taken for a woman to reach orgasm is longer than the time taken by a man. This difference between men & women is something natural. Therefore the husband/male should arouse the wife/ female before sexual intercourse and should not start the act until then.

- (3) It has to be explained to the couple that there is no definite number of times for the act of sexual intercourse. Most young couples have sexual intercourse about 3-4 times per week after marriage while some couples have it 2-4 times a day. This has to be considered as natural.
- (4) The act of sexual intercourse in general is by using vagina & penis, but oral sex, anal sex, inter-crural sex (between thighs), coitus interfemoris (between legs) or between breasts could be used too. These are considered to be accepted ways of having sexual relationship between healthy persons of opposite sex.

Whatever the way sexual relationship takes place between a man and woman it should be with the mutual need, concurrence & willingness of both partners

To increase the pleasure of the sexual relationship, various coital positions and imaginary positions (sexual fantasy) are used.

There are two serious problems which can arise with the very first sexual act.

- (1) Inability of the woman to prove her virginity.
- (2) Failure of the 1st act of sexual intercourse.

1. A virgin is a female who has never had sexual intercourse of any type with a man. There is a belief in the Sri Lankan society that the very 1st act of sexual intercourse should break the hymen of the woman causing some bleeding to occur. But this does not happen always. The hymen is a thin membrane located about 1cm internal to the vaginal opening and this is absent from birth in about 20-25% of the females. In some the hymen is thick and the aperture in the centre of the membrane takes various shapes and differ in elasticity and blood supply too. Therefore one cannot expect the hymen to break and bleed at the 1st sexual intercourse in the case of every woman.
2. There are reasons related to both male & female for the failure of the 1st sexual intercourse during their honeymoon.
- 3.

- ❖ Vaginismus-in the woman
- ❖ Performance anxiety- in the man

Vaginismus

Vaginismus is a condition in the female the muscles of the thighs, around the vagina and lower abdomen contract suddenly, when the man tries to insert the erect penis into her vagina. This prevents entry of penis and obstructs the course of sexual intercourse beyond that. This may happen everytime they try to have intercourse. The main reason for this is the women's belief that the 1st sexual intercourse is very painful and the fear arising from that. As this condition needs counseling and specific treatment the couple should seek medical advice.

Performance anxiety

A belief prevailing in the Sri Lankan society and in many other societies is that the success of the sexual relationship is the sole responsibility of the man. This poses a threat to the young man taking up married life and affects his 1st sexual intercourse on the wedding night. The fear, doubt and negative mentality could be minimized by proper counseling & correct understanding of the sexual act. This condition causes anxiety and mental depression in many young men.

Sexual response differences between male and female

Stage	Male	Female
(1) Arousal	Happens fast within a short time	Requires more time than a male
(2) Plateau	Lasts a short period and leads towards orgasm	Retained for a longer period than in a male
(3) Orgasm	Semen is ejected with orgasm (ejaculation)	No such ejection of fluid. Gets sense of mental satisfaction, pleasant feeling and reaches a climax.

(4) Resolution	Penis loses erection. Pulse rate, respiratory rate, muscle tension, temperature, blood pressure come back to normal & he falls asleep.	Most women say that it is a wonderful and pleasant state of awakening of body and feelings.
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In the Sri Lankan society there are many myths related to sexuality which do not have any scientific basis. Some of those are stated below. These myths prevent the maximum enjoyment of sexual relationship.

- ❖ virginity and hymen – the thought that the hymen should rupture and cause bleeding mandatorily.
- ❖ The thought that the main factor for woman's sexual satisfaction is the size of the erect penis.
- ❖ The indication of a successful sexual relationship is the simultaneous achievement of orgasm by the man and woman.
- ❖ The thought that swallowing of semen will result in a pregnancy.

It is very useful for the couple to discuss with each other about their sexual needs and issues openly. This will minimize major problems and enable seeking medical advice. It is important to explain to them that by following medical advice they will be able to lead a successful married life.

02 Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Although sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent to a considerable extent in our society, people in Sri Lanka are reluctant to talk about these diseases yet. This deprives them of the chances to learn about sexually transmitted diseases. Even when people with these diseases present to a doctor they are reluctant to talk about their problems openly.

Under these circumstances it is important to create awareness among people on sexually transmitted diseases, the need to talk about them openly and seek prompt treatment if infected. It is the responsibility & the duty of all healthcare workers to provide people with the required knowledge and awareness to change attitudes & behaviours to prevent contracting sexually transmitted diseases and transmission from an infected person to another. Therefore it is very important for the health staff to be well equipped with thorough knowledge & understanding about sexually transmitted diseases.

Due to the fear of possible social stigma the people infected with sexually transmitted disease tend to delay seeking medical advice or treatment. Therefore it is very important that health staff reassure them regarding privacy and confidentiality of treatment and advice given in hospitals.

1. Facts to be remembered

- ❖ Men & women infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases may present to you with various symptoms.

Symptoms common among females

- ❖ Unusual yellowish, offensive discharge from the vagina.
- ❖ Ulcers, warts in the genital area
- ❖ Pain in the lower abdomen
- ❖ Changes in the menstrual cycle

Symptoms among males

- ❖ Discharge from the urethra
- ❖ Dysurea or burning sensation while passing urine
- ❖ Ulcers, warts in the genital area
- ❖ Pain in the scrotum, swelling of scrotum etc.

2. Sometimes those who are infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases do not show any symptoms. Therefore it has to be well informed to people that it is very important to seek medical advice after an unsafe sexual contact. This situation is common to both males and females but more to men.

The risk in this situation is that these people without symptoms may spread the disease without even their knowledge.

3. Sexually Transmitted Diseases caused by bacteria such as syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia could be cured completely by appropriate treatment with antibiotics.

But those infections caused by viruses such as genital Herpes, Venereal warts& HIV do not have medicines to cure them completely. However certain drugs may help to control them to some extent.

4.If sexually transmitted diseases are not treated properly there would be complications such as sub-fertility, visual defects, problems in the nervous system etc.If women in the child bearing age contract Sexually Transmitted Diseases, transmission to the baby could occur during pregnancy or at the time of delivery. Complications such as abortion, premature delivery, low birth weight, still births or infant deaths may occur. The babies born alive to these women may have various congenital deformities such as eye defects, heart defects and mental retardation.

5. Presence of venereal diseases which cause ulcers in genitalia (breaching the skin) such as gonorrhea, **trichomoniasis** make people more susceptible to HIV infection.

Mode of Infection of Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The main mode of transmission of Sexually Transmitted Diseases from one person to another is unsafe sexual intercourse with an infected person. Therefore the mode of infection of sexually transmitted diseases is based on sexual behavior of people.

e.g.

1. Having sexual relationship with more than one male or female partner.
2. Frequent changing the sexual partner.
3. Having sexual relationship with persons who are involved in sex for want of money or for drug addiction.
4. Having homosexual relationships
5. Inability to use a condom correctly for any of the above sexual relationships (vaginal, oral, anal or any other form of sexual relationship without a condom poses the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases)

Further

1. By transfusion of blood of an infected person
2. Via use of sharp items like needles used by infected persons (needle pricks/tattooing /intravenous drug use - IDU)
3. From an infected mother to the baby during pregnancy or at delivery.

As health care workers it is our duty to refer persons with any of above high risk behaviours to STD clinics irrespective of whether they have symptoms or not. There are STD clinics attached to all the main hospitals in the island and all healthcare workers should know about the services provided by these clinics. This will help them to provide necessary information to others.

03 A Planned Family

The success of any activity depends on how you plan to implement it. A newly married couple from the beginning of their life should plan about the time they wish have their 1st child and the total number of children they want to have and the spacing between children. The couple should think of their age, their needs and their resources etc and come to a decision regarding the above.

In Sri Lanka the number of abortions done per day is on the increase (according to a survey done in 1999 it was found to be about 658 abortions per day). The reason for this is that there are

many couples who do not wish to have children, but still do not practice a proper family planning method.(high unmet need for contraception)

Encouraging these men & women to use modern family planning methods will reduce complications of illegal abortions and maternal deaths.

Having babies before the woman is 20 yrs would result in health hazards in the woman and a negative impact on the baby too. Due to the young age and immaturity the mother would not be able to provide proper care to the children causing problems in their early childhood growth and development. Therefore it is very important that healthcare workers give the young women an understanding of family planning methods which could be used before 20 yrs.

Sometimes a young couple may wish to delay the 1st child due to various reasons (health problems, financial difficulties & various social problems) However, the best age to have children is between 20-35 yrs. Hence it should be made clear to them that it is best if the 1st child is born before the woman is 30 yrs.

The best methods of family planning for newly married couples to delay the 1st childbirth are

- (1) Oral pills (OCP) -for females
- (2) Condoms – for males

After 1st child birth to space the subsequent births the following could be used.

1. DMPA – Injection
2. Implants - Implanon
3. Intra Uterine Contraceptive Device – Device placed in the uterine cavity
4. Oral pills from 6 months after childbirth.

There are some natural methods of family planning for couples who do not wish to use modern contraceptives. These have a lower success rate than the modern methods. The failure rate is around 30% and therefore have a higher chance of getting pregnant while using the method. The natural methods are

1. Calendar Method
2. Basal Body Temperature Method

3. Cervical Mucus Method
4. Sympto-thermal Method

For couples who have completed their family, those who have had complications in previous pregnancies and those who have undergone several cesarean sections, permanent family planning methods are the best option. The two permanent methods available are female sterilization (LRT) for women and male sterilization (vasectomy) for men.

Sub-fertility

It is important to pay attention to sub-fertility, a problem which is a major concern of many married couples today. Sub-fertility is a condition where a couple fails to conceive for more than one year after (having had successful sexual intercourse without using any family planning method) marriage. There are many causes of sub-fertility in the woman or the man.

One of the main causes of sub-fertility is the couple's lack of awareness about how to have successful sexual intercourse.

Causes of sub-fertility

Male	Female
(1) Lack of required quantity of sperms in the semen to enable effective fertilization or complete absence of sperms in the semen. (1) Inability of the sperms to reach the ovum through cervical mucus to effect fertilization	(1) Lack of proper release of the ovum. (2) Inability to have effective implantation of the fertilized ovum in the uterus. (3) Inability to retain the fertilized ovum in the uterus

If you come across a sub-fertile couple, action should be taken to refer them to an Obstetrician & Gynaecologist.

04. Protect the Health of Mother and Child through provision of their nutritional requirements.

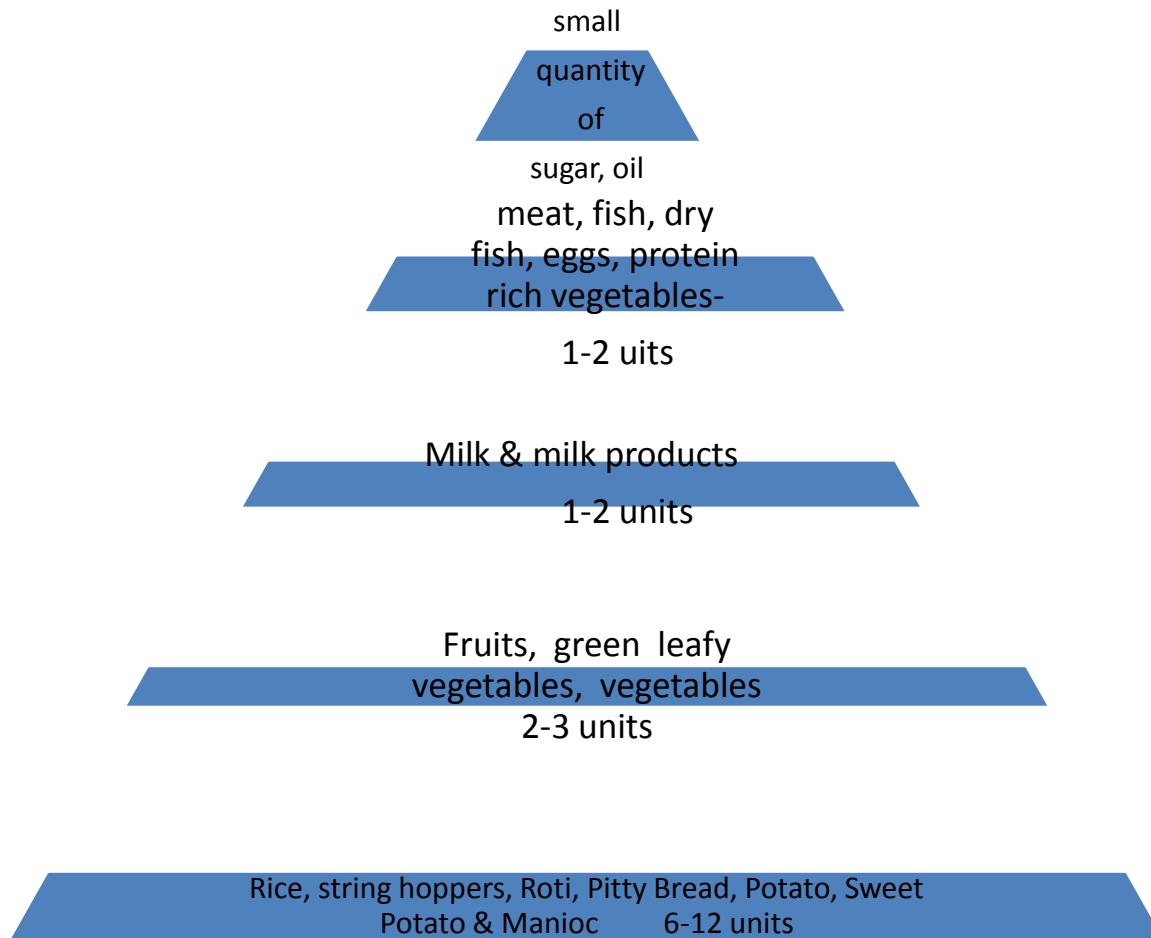
A healthy mother can give birth to a heavy baby. A woman's nutritional status is important for her to conceive, to have a healthy baby and prevent birth of low weight babies. Therefore it is important to address nutritional problems in a woman before she becomes pregnant so that she will have a good nutritional status at the time of conception.

Every woman should have her Body Mass Index (BMI) between 18.5 – 24.9 and be free of vitamin deficiencies and anaemia. By getting used to a mixed diet one could obtain all the nutritional requirements of the body.

How to respond to persons with varying nutritional status.

Those with BMI between 18.5-24.9	Commend him/her for maintaining within the correct BMI. Encourage her/him to continue with the mixed diet and do regular physical exercise.
BMI above the upper limit of the normal range (BMI >24.9)	Inquire about her/his dietary pattern. Make him/her aware of the importance of a mixed diet pattern and the need to consider the quantitative aspect of the diet and regular physical exercise to reduce the weight. However they have to be informed that a rapid weight reduction is not advisable. (a reduction of wt more than 500 gm per month is not advised) By avoiding additional meals (snacks) sweets and getting used to a systematic diet will help in weight reduction. Further, including more cereals, vegetables, fruits in the diet and

	consuming low calorie food and drinks will help them in their effort to reduce weight.
Those who have low BMI, less than 18.5	Inquire about her/his dietary pattern and the quantity of food taken, illnesses etc. Explain about the need to increase the quantity of food and to include snacks in between main meals. It is important to explain that his/her consumption of food will be more than that of other persons of the same age. Physical exercise will have to be continued (Investigations should be done to exclude disease conditions which cause malnutrition or weight loss)



The above food pyramid details out the daily food requirements of an adult with a variety of food items and the required quantities.

The quantity per unit is as follows

- ❖ Cooked rice, cereal - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
- ❖ Bread one slice (450 gm loaf cut into 9 slices)
- ❖ Bun- $\frac{1}{2}$
- ❖ Potato (size of 2 eggs)- 1
- ❖ Sweet potato (size of an egg)- 1
- ❖ Cream cracker biscuits- 3

Milk & milk products per unit

- ❖ Milk-100ml
- ❖ Yoghurt -cup 1
- ❖ Cheese one piece (size of a box of matches)
- ❖ Milk powder – 3 teaspoons full

Fish/meat/dry fish & other varieties of proteins

- ❖ Cooked dhal – 3table spoons full
- ❖ Egg- 1
- ❖ Cooked fish, chicken or beef 20-50gm (size of a box of matches).
- ❖ Sprats – 6

Vegetables

- ❖ Cooked vegetables3 table spoons full
- ❖ Green leafy vegetables - ½ cup

Fruits

- ❖ Average size plantain or orange -1

People take food for hunger but they are not concerned about the nutritional value of food. This leads to nutritional problems. In most Sri Lankan diets the major part consists of carbohydrates and fats while proteins, vitamins, minerals & fibres and water intake is inadequate. This may lead to obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and constipation etc. It is important to educate people to reduce the quantity of carbohydrates (rice, bread, food stuff made out of wheat flour, potatoes, sweet potatoes, jak, bread fruit etc.) in their diet and to increase the quantity of cereals, fruits & green leafy vegetables.

The importance of various constituents of nutrients in the diet

Carbohydrates

- Carbohydrates are converted into glucose in the body and provide energy for body activities

Proteins

- To build muscles
- To build tissues
- To maintain immune systems
- To produce hormones

Proteins are digested by enzymes and converted into amino acids and absorbed into the blood. Therefore it is very important to include proteins such as fish, meat, eggs dry fish or sprats (animal proteins) or vegetable proteins such as soya, green gram, chick-pea, cowpea, dhal, beans etc.in the daily diet. There are 21 amino acids which are very essential for the body and these are present only in animal proteins and milk. Therefore vegetarians should be encouraged to take milk daily. Ideally a mixed diet (balanced diet) would contain all the nutritional requirements of the body.

Fats

- Provide energy for the body
- Used to produce female hormones such as oestrogen& progesterone
- Helps in the absorption of vitamins A,D,E and K

Daily consumption of foods having excess fats would cause

- Obesity
- High Blood Pressure
- High Cholesterol in blood
- Heart diseases

Vitamins

Vitamins help in protecting health to a great extent. They are very essential to the body.

- For development of body
- For maintenance of body
- For immunity

Vitamins are needed in small quantities. But it is important to have them in the daily diet. Fresh vegetables, specially the yellow coloured vegetables and fruits, green leafy vegetables, specially legumes like long beans, beans, winged beans, drum stick contain vitamins. These should be included in the diet. Vitamin C is rich in nelly, wood apple, guava, ripe papaya, plantains, mangoes, ripe pineapple etc. These could be taken after the main meals. This will also help to absorb the iron contained in animal proteins and vegetables.

Minerals

Calcium, Iron, Iodine and Zinc are minerals which should be available in the diet in small quantities. They perform important functions.

- Proper heart muscle contraction
- To carry oxygen to cells
- To produce haemoglobin
- To have strong bones and teeth and maintain them
- To maintain muscle contractions of the body
- For functioning of thyroid gland

Iron is absorbed easily from food items containing haem-iron which is present in animal foods such as fish meat etc. when the iron is in the form of non-haem iron such as iron available in green leaves (thampala, sarana, gtukola, mukunuvanna) is not absorbed easily, but it is important to include greenleafy vegetables in the diet as they contain other minerals and vitamins too.

Absorption of non-haem iron could be facilitated by

- adding some lime juice after cooking the food item
- taking some fruits containing vitamin C such as guava, nelli, mango, papaya, pineapple, orange etc. after meals.
- adding some animal proteins e.g. Maldivian fish, dry fish or sprats in the food while cooking.

To facilitate better absorption of haem iron in green gram – cowpea, chick pea, urud dhal etc.

- Soak over night
- Allow to germinate
- Ferment

Iron absorption is hindered by

- Tea, coffee (tannin, caffeine)
- Calcium
- Fibre rich food

Therefore coffee, tea should be avoided just before or after meals.

There is high calcium content in milk, yoghurt, curd etc. Wood apple is a fruit rich in calcium while lotus root is a vegetable rich in calcium. Sesame, maize, oil seeds are also nutritious food varieties.

Consumption of poor quality food purchased from various food outlets may cause infections like hepatitis, typhoid, diarrhea and dysentery. Therefore people should be advised to consume food prepared at home and drink boiled cooled water in adequate quantity for proper functioning of the kidneys and bowels (to prevent constipation). It is important to consume natural food items and avoid junk foods (with artificial flavours, colouring, and excess oil etc.) as much as possible. Meat and fish should be well cooked and consumed.

When food items are selected one should be careful about the nutritional value and their prices too. Priority should be given to food items easily available in the area which are not so costly. People shouldn't be deceived by attractive advertisements on TV & other places. If some of and

lifestyles these fruits, vegetables and green leaves could be grown in the home garden you could enjoy their fresh and natural taste while being assured they are free of insecticides.

Taking meals all family members seated together would help develop mutual understanding as well as give an opportunity to discuss problems that would have arisen at home, at work place as well as the future plans of the family together. This will set a good example for the children too. Therefore the husband and wife should make it a point to have at least one meal a day seated together.

Women who are hoping to conceive soon or pregnant at present should be advised to take 1 tablet (5 mg) of folic acid daily. This is important for proper development of the brain & nervous system of the foetus and to prevent certain congenital defects in the nervous systems.

05. Influence of good living & healthy life styles on the health of the mother child and the family

The food consumed by the pregnant mother influences the growth of the baby, likewise pregnant mother's virtuous thoughts & her mental relaxation influence the brain and intellectual development of her baby.

A pleasant environment promotes a clear mind. Therefore it is important to inform people to keep their home and the surrounding area clean. It has to be explained to them about the importance of allocating adequate time for leisure activities such as going on trips and visiting relatives to spend some time together peacefully.

It is parents who transfer values to their children. The parents should encourage the children to listen to fascinating soft music & songs, read books and get involved in religious activities.

These practices among women during pregnancy would promote the development of brain and intelligence of the baby.

If the husband is a smoker the wife becomes a passive smoker when he smokes inside the house. Exposure to cigarette smoke during pregnancy may cause low birth weight and respiratory tract problems in the baby. Husband's alcohol addiction is very hazardous to his own health and is a root cause for domestic violence, accidents and economic downfall of the family, affecting health and well being of the mother and child as well.

Women who tend to inhale smoke more while cooking or from other sources (e.g. generated from industries) should adjust the surroundings to get fresh air adequately.

The dental problems which are likely to be aggravated during pregnancy are dental caries and gum diseases. Dental caries is a communicable disease. The commonest causative agent is a bacteria (*streptococcus mutans*). The newborn baby can get infection from his/her close associates such as mother or father. Their saliva containing bacteria may infect the baby and predispose to dental caries later in life. Therefore maintaining good oral health by the father and mother is importance for prevention of dental problems in the baby.

A woman who vomits frequently during morning sickness may develop the risk of dental caries due to the acidic secretions of the stomach which enter the mouth and come in contact with the enamel of the teeth. Due to hormonal changes in pregnancy there can be a tendency for swelling of gums and bleeding too. Therefore special attention should be paid to oral health of all pregnant women.

Daily Exercise

Daily exercise will help

- to maintain strength of the body
- to keep blood cholesterol at a lower level
- to have a healthy clean mind
- to promote health

Doing some daily exercise is important for both husband and wife to lead a healthy life. Healthcare workers should educate the couple on the importance of daily exercise.

06. Ensure a successful married life through mutual understanding.
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Family is the smallest social unit in the society. The success and cordiality of the family depends on the strength of their bonding. If the bonding of a marriage is father centered and mother driven it would be a great support for the success of family life.

Characteristics of a cordial relationship

1. The couple likes the association of each other
2. There is honest & productive exchange of ideas between the couple.
3. The couple is able to accept weaknesses of each other and to understand the value of each other.
4. Would not attempt to control the spouse.
5. Do not have expectations which could not be achieved.
6. Mutual respect and accepting opinions of each other.
7. Able to adjust to a life style in keeping with their social and economic status.
8. Able to balance between freedom and bonding of the marriage. It is important to think of one's freedom within limits while considering the freedom of the other person as well.
9. Being able to enjoy the success of the spouse.

Characteristics of a bad relationship

1. One person depends on the other to fulfill all his/her requirements.

2. Having a tendency to be jealous about the other person.
3. One person expects total commitment & attention only on himself/herself
4. Is authoritative and dominates over the spouse and controls him/her
5. Thinks only of her/his needs and neglects the other person's needs and expectations.
6. Causes physical and mental harassment and violence.

Features which indicate problems in married life.

1. Poor communication and lack of exchange of ideas, less talking, absence of discussion and not listening to the other person.
2. Accumulation of unsolved problems. Inability to find solutions due to poor communication. When they quarrel they come out with their unsolved problems.
3. Inadequate time spent together by the couple. They do not work together and there is no opportunity for development of love and affection between them.
4. Presence of violence & mental harassment

Competencies necessary to develop a cordial relationship.

1. Trust-ability to have trust and hopes regarding the spouse, trust that the spouse will be considerate towards him/her.
2. Honesty- Speaks the truth. Ability to express what he/she thinks (says what he/she does and does what he/she says).
3. Communication- Ability to exchange ideas and listen patiently without disturbing when the spouse expresses his/her ideas. Ability to understand feelings by the other person's gestures & expressions, and respond appropriately are important communication skills the couple should acquire (non-verbal communication) It is important for the couple to be able to come to a consensus at the end of the confrontation.

4. Empathy- Ability of the spouse to understand the feelings & needs of the other person (empathy)
5. Confidentiality- To safeguard the trust and secrecy between each other & not to divulge the feelings and thoughts and their very personal matters to others.
6. Loyalty- To be faithful to each other and committed to fulfill the needs of each other and be together in good & bad times.
7. Mutual Understanding and acceptance- Be able to understand one's character traits and the fact that the spouse's thoughts & needs are different to his/her own thoughts & needs.
8. Common decisions- Be able to discuss and come to a feasible common consensus on matters of different opinion.

There are many challenges that a couple has to face in their married life and those should be overcome by taking careful decisions and productive actions. Taking abrupt decisions and impulsive actions would complicate married life and therefore these situations should be avoided. Further, it has to be realized that at times of agitation people do not see the reality and therefore taking decisions at such times may not be advisable.

As and when the health staff come across families with disputes, they should take action to refer them to counseling services established at the offices of the divisional secretaries.

Sometimes the couple you come across may be awaiting parenthood with their pleasant expectations. It is your duty to create awareness among them that, in today's complex society they may face many challenges and at such times to take decisions wisely and patiently. In the present day society the day to day activities of men & women are influenced by various cultural social, educational, occupational and financial factors based on gender differentials.

**07.A successful Family should
be devoid of violence.**

What we mean by gender is the set of responsibilities, duties and social models given to males & females by their society and culture.

Gender is something created by the society and it keeps on changing depending on the social strata, time, culture etc. Things have changed over time and created a big gap between men & women in terms of responsibilities, duties and rights. The man has acquired position as the head or the manager and the main income earner as well as the user of finances while the women is expected to hold the responsibility of cooking, performing other household chores and caring for children. These daily roles of men & women are influenced by social cultural educational occupational and economic factors based on gender.

The conventional difference in power and strength between men & women have created male dominance over women. The healthcare workers should explain to the couple how these responsibilities should be shared between the husband and wife to ensure peace & happiness of the family. Some women suffer from effects of mental, physical & sexual violence against them and family disputes due to the male dominance within the family. As some women tend to suffer in silence accepting it as something they have to tolerate, domestic violence is not brought out visibly as a problem in the society. But today the World Health Organization has identified this as a public health problem. Violence should be rejected from the entire global society and every religion has rejected it.

There are instances when violence affects children and workers too. Conventionally Sri Lankan Society is accustomed to reject violence and generally we treat our neighbors and even animals with kindness and compassion. Violence within the home is very unfavorable for mental development of the children. Sometimes there are men who experience violence from women. This is also something that should not happen.

Those who cause violence give various excuses for their act of violence.

- Sudden anger & provocation
- Alcoholism
- To correct the wife and children
- The thinking that they have the right to cause violence to family members

But none of the above reasons can justify violence. These are worthless excuses given by men who have confused mentality and are used to a lifestyle in an environment with violence. The reasons for violence is the inability of a person to control arrogance, take up things and have mutual respect. A person under the influence of alcohol uses it as a weapon against others to carry out acts of violence. Anger should never be converted into violence.

Fighting and attacking each other are acts we see in the animal world. Therefore the human being with an advanced mind should be able to control arrogance and avoid provocative action and harm to others. This should be a difference between human beings and animals. Converting anger to harmful action can never be justified. Sometimes people who consume alcohol use it as a weapon to cause violence.

There are people who engage in violence without even alcohol. Some people though they say that they use various forms of violence to correct their children, the consequences would be far more worse. The ultimate result is not the good the perpetrator expects by using violence. The children may get used to considering violence as something normal and it will affect their own lives in the future.

In addition the uncertainty due to poverty, immaturity, type of job, extra marital relationships and problems in sexual life may encourage violence. Lack of proper attention of legal bodies and legal institutions working on preventing domestic violence may result in an increase of the problem of violence.

The harmful effects of violence

1. Economic

- ❖ Due to prevailing violence at home the family will collapse financially.

2. Spiritual aspect

- ❖ The children of families with violence may get addicted to alcohol & drugs
- ❖ Use filthy words & other harmful acts
- ❖ Children would see violence as a normal behavior
- ❖ Children may get used to anti-social activities
- ❖ Children themselves would perpetrate violence when they are adults
- ❖ Lack of supervision of children by parents
- ❖ Higher chance for children to leave school early.
- ❖ Inability of the mother to perform her responsibilities in the family due to her mental uneasiness.
- ❖ Collapse on the family integrity.

3. Health Effects

Physical

- ❖ Children are more prone to accidents
- ❖ Permanent damage to organs (eg: Cuts, fractures, lacerations , blindness, deafness and head injury)
- ❖ Sexual abuse, and exposure to Sexually Transmitted Diseases due to unsafe sex.

Mental

- ❖ Children live with fear due to lack of security and they are physically & mentally not at ease. Due to loss of appetite may encounter nutritional problems.
- ❖ Depression, nostalgia in women & children
- ❖ Disturbance to education of children due to mental stress.

During pregnancy

If a woman is subjected to violence during her pregnancy the physical and mental development of the baby would get affected.

More chances for

- ❖ Abortions
- ❖ Still births
- ❖ Premature/low birth weight babies
- ❖ Birth of babies with deformities
- ❖ Post partumhaemorrhage

- ❖ The babies born to women subjected to violence are six times more likely to die before the age of 5 years.
- ❖ ¼ of deaths among children under 5 years is due to violence against the mother during pregnancy.
- ❖ 14-32% of women in the world are subjected to physical and sexual violence.
- ❖ 16% of maternal deaths in India are due to violence by the husband (WHR 2005)

Mothers mental happiness and physical fitness are of utmost importance for the health & wellbeing of her children. It is important for the health & happiness of the husband too. A violence free home gives a favourable environment for a healthy happy family.

Whatever the social status of the family, lack of mutual understanding is one of the important causes for presence of violence in that house. As we all know there are no families free of problems. It is important to understand the situation and solve problems with good interpersonal communication and face challenges in family life successfully. The newly married couple should be made aware of all these facts and special focus should be paid to the important role of the husband in the overall welfare of the family.

Our objective should be to get rid of violence totally (zero tolerance of violence). A family free of violence would be a healthy, happy and economically sound family in the society.

08.Parenthood

A mother is a woman who bears a child, delivers it and cares for it and safeguards it as her own life. According to biological sciences “woman” is considered as a machine to secure human genes. But in the civilized society invariably she inherits a prestigious human esteem by birth. This gives her certain basic rights in life. The right to live, freedom, receive equal treatment, to enjoy a fair life, healthcare, leisure, pleasure and planned motherhood are important ones among these.

Reproduction is the process of producing a new generation. The beginning of this is the production of ova & sperms and the end result is the point is when the new living being becomes independent to lead a definite life of his/her own. Sexual intercourse between a man and woman initiates the new generation. After contributing the sperm a man's role stops in the process of reproduction. But then what do we understand by paternity or fatherhood?

Piya (Sinhalese) Appa (Tamil) Pithru (Pali & Sanskrit) father (English) Pater (Latin & Greek) are terms used to address father in different languages. All these words have the sound ‘p’ which means ‘caretaker’.

The man biologically is a living being willing to live as a couple. A couple which has sexual intercourse is not only “sexual unit” but is a “parent unit” too. The longer they perform the function of parenthood their bond becomes stronger. Fatherhood or father's participation is to perform and fulfill the duties of a father in a civilized human society. The extent of civilization of the society depends on the extent to which father's role is fulfilled.

Man is not a living being to reproduce in large numbers. We are a group of living beings to produce young ones of good quality rather than in large numbers. Unlike in the animal world

human beings give care & protection to the young ones over a long period with dedicated parenthood throughout life.

By getting children to undertake responsibilities from their childhood we can prepare them gradually for noble parenthood.

The components of antenatal care are

1. To identify high risk mothers and refer them to a hospital with specialist care
2. To prevent serious complications & take appropriate action for those
3. Maternal Health Education

The 1st two activities are very well established and implemented countrywide in Sri Lanka. Our maternal & child health indicators bear evidence for this. However the 3rd component, that is maternal health education is somewhat lagging behind.

From the point of view of the woman centered “safe motherhood concept” it is believed that the “equity & equality for the woman” in our society is weak at present. If equity & equality can be achieved for all women, then invariably safe motherhood would be secured for all women. If so it is our duty to make every effort to achieve this.

It should be understood that ensuring equity & equality for women in the society is not only a health problem as such. It depends on the social & political factors. Therefore it is obvious that to solve some of these problems we need to get the cooperation and help of non-health sectors (institutions and organizations etc.)

Lack of equality is sometimes misused by men as a weapon and it is a reason for poor male participation too. This indicates that there is no proper counseling service to rectify this discrepancy by creating awareness among males about the need to ensure equity and equality for women.

This unawareness and the deep rooted traditional ideologies, attitudes developed from childhood regarding gender (ideologies on gender differentials) make the man unresponsive to his duties related to reproductive health.

Equality should be maintained through a process of counseling as appropriate to the situation. Men should be made sensitive through suitable programmes. A man should realize that his pregnant wife is preparing to present him with the most precious wealth in this world, a child of his own and fatherhood to him. Isn't this the best time for him to perform all his duties as a husband and a father to be?

When we keep on saying that the male partner should be concerned about maternal health, it generally gives the impression that men are not contributing much to maternal health at present. This is not the reality. A famous song written by Mrs. Malini Jayaratne and sung by veteran singer Mr. T.M. Jayaratne tells us the feelings of a father towards his son.

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This wail of a father tells us about his love for his son and the fact that he has contributed so much to his son's life while standing behind the mother. It says that the father does not get due recognition for his paternal love and care for the son as compared with the recognition the mother gets for the role played by her.

Our healthcare workers are partly responsible for this situation regarding appreciation of the father's role. When both father & pregnant mother come to the clinic, the woman is taken in and the husband is made to stay outside the hospital or clinic gate. Thus the clinic separates the husband from the wife when the couple comes to receive pregnancy care making him an inactive partner. This is an injustice to the pregnant mother & to her baby too. The woman is made to bear the pregnancy discomfort, mental stress and delivery pain all by herself. At the end, the burden of bringing up the child also falls on the woman. In this situation the aforementioned equity and equality concerns of women are violated completely.

If we could get the full corporation and participation of the male partner or the husband, we would be able to further improve the quality of our maternal and child health services. This would enable us to reach the maternal health indicators of developed countries. Although our society today seems to accept gender equality and equity for the sake of the words but when it comes to implementation people do not contribute much by way of action.

At the time of delivery of a baby which is the most crucial and sensitive moment of the life of a woman, she gets mentally and physically tired. This is the time she prepares herself to welcome the most valued treasure which makes her married life complete. This certainly is the best time she would love to have the kindness, warmth, love & affection of her beloved husband. Therefore she should not be deprived of this opportunity by confining her into a labour room without her husband.

Healthcare workers tend to think that the only expectation of the society regarding child birth is to have a safe delivery. It should be well realized by them that it is equally important to make the mother comfortable, her feelings and thoughts pleasant, and her mental stress alleviated to support an uneventful delivery. The time has come for all healthcare workers to remove the obstructions which hide the reality regarding mother's actual needs at the time of delivery.

You may now realize that our aim should not be limited to a safe delivery only. Attention should be paid to the mother's total health and well-being including her mental relaxation. We have to pay attention to the baby's health and stability as well as family's wellbeing in total. Our attention should be in fairness to all mothers and not only to the staff members or to those women who are known to the staff.

Time has come to make a change in the attitudes and practices to encompass the broader concept of reproductive health & wellbeing of the mother. The focal or the central person of reproductive health is the mother and our duty should be to ensure that she has good thoughts and expectations and she is physically and mentally healthy. As per the old traditions, keeping the husband away from her at crucial times would be a great obstacle to this effort of ours. Therefore programmes should be adjusted to bring the husband closer to the wife during the whole process of providing maternal care and if possible to get him right into the labour room too.

As the entire society has placed so much trust and confidence in our healthcare delivery system, making a broader change in this regard would not be difficult task at all.

Hand Book for Healthcare Workers

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Sri Lanka is well recognized and honored as a country

that provides very good Maternal and Child Health services to the people. This is due to our collective efforts and commitment to implement appropriate policies in the field of Maternal and Child Health.

We need to expand our achievements reached in terms of quantity to encompass quality aspects too. As such we are always on the lookout for evidence based strategies to fulfill this objective and this new activity is a step towards that .

By this we hope to provide knowledge and awareness to the newly wedded couple having lot of expectations and help to them to lead a successful married life.

This guide will help you to refresh your knowledge and help the newly married couple to fulfill their expectations.

