Midwives current knowledge of asthma in pregnancy and their perceived role in antenatal asthma management – a qualitative descriptive study

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Introduction
Asthma continues to be one of the most common potentially serious conditions that can complicate pregnancy. At least 12% of pregnant women in Australia are affected by asthma. Many studies have examined the link between poorly controlled asthma and increased exacerbations during pregnancy with increased fetal and maternal morbidity.

Aim
The aim of this study was to determine midwives’ current knowledge of asthma in pregnancy and what they felt their role was in providing antenatal asthma management.

Method
A qualitative descriptive study was undertaken with 13 registered midwives participating in one face-to-face interview. Data collected from these interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Findings
Preliminary findings from these data show that midwives’ current knowledge of asthma in pregnancy varied greatly among the sample group with some participants having some awareness of possible changes in asthma symptoms during pregnancy but few participants knowing the potential consequences of poor asthma management. The perceived role of midwives in antenatal asthma management also varied with some midwives stating they felt their role was to educate women regarding their asthma and others stating their role was to refer to other health professionals. Many barriers to providing antenatal asthma management were also identified by the midwives and suggested solutions offered.

Conclusion
There was no uniform approach to antenatal asthma management being undertaken in this facility. Development of an antenatal asthma clinical pathway could help change current clinical practice regarding asthma management of pregnant women and make it a more uniform process. The provision of education to those providing antenatal asthma management could also help determine the role midwives undertake when caring for a woman with asthma. The findings of this study also have implications for further research into the role of the midwife working with women with complex needs during the antenatal period.