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Presentation:  
An exploration of midwifery practice during birth: rites of passage  

This presentation will discuss the findings of qualitative research undertaken during a PhD candidature. The aim of the research was to explore women’s experience of birth, and midwifery practice during birth. Many routine practices carried out during birth are not evidence based. The study aimed to identify common practices, the rationale for their use, and the influence on women’s experience of birth. A narrative approach was taken and birth stories were gathered from mothers and midwives during in-depth interviews. The participants had either experienced or attended a spontaneous vaginal birth, and were encouraged to share their story of this experience. Ten mothers and ten midwives were interviewed and their experiences included a range of birth settings – public hospital, private hospital and home. Narratives were created from the interview transcripts and analysed to identify themes.  

The key findings centre on the experience of birth as a liminal journey during which mothers have specific needs. Rites of passage and rites of protection are enacted by midwives during this journey. Rites of passage involve practices that build self trust and prepare the woman for her role as mother. Rites of protection involve practices aimed at assessing the birth journey and the wellbeing of mother and baby. The rites of passage and the rites of protection can conflict and influence the experience of birth for mothers.  

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