

EDITORIAL

MIDWIFERY EDUCATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE – CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

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Midwifery work in the territory of Central Europe is based on a long tradition. The role of midwives in the then Austrian Empire, which comprised most of Central Europe, was firstly defined as early as 1552 by the order of *Ordopolitiae*, issued by Ferdinand I of Habsburg, Holy Roman emperor (Zalai, 1973). In 1799, the first legal order for the provision of health care, *Taxa Pharmaceutica*, came into force. Article XIV of the Act of 1876 on the Organization of Public Health further tightened the qualification requirements for midwives as a regular course at university or a specialized school (Falisová & Morovicsová, 2015). After the First World War, successor states took on the high education requirements in midwifery, as a highly respected profession.

As part of the European Union integration process, a new requirement for university higher education of midwives was introduced in the early 2000s. Emphasis is placed on deep theoretical knowledge allowing effective understanding of the fundamental qualities of the profession. Practical lessons focus on the skills and abilities essential for the practical implementation of scientific knowledge. Compared to the past, experienced midwives are now far more involved in the process of education than physicians – obstetricians. Graduates with a university education are equipped to provide autonomous evidence-based midwifery practice (Mivšek et al., 2016).

To date, midwives in Central Europe have taken a postgraduate programme in nursing. However, for it to be a fully-fledged field, midwifery must have its own third level of university education to provide high-quality continuous postgraduate education and to carry out scientific research, as in most developed countries. Successful accreditation at all three levels of education together with the possibility of completing the postdoctoral teaching qualification process (Habilitation) and the process for the appointment of professors would seem to be the most topical challenge for midwifery in Central Europe.

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