

Maternal & infant care

.... on your phone

A recent innovative project successfully used SMS text messaging to bring essential maternal care information to thousands of midwives in South Africa. Prof Dave Woods, whose brainchild this was, reports.

The aim was to reach practicing midwives, many of whom work in primary care settings and do not have easy access to opportunities for continuing education. Each midwife received a weekly text message on a cell phone. This contained an important nugget of practical knowledge selected from the Maternal Care course book of the Perinatal Education Programme¹. The length of each message was limited to 160 spaces to reduce costs and was followed by the Sister Lillian website². Midwives with access to the internet could then contact this website which was linked to the contents of the Maternal Care book on the publisher's website³. In this way, further information and details about the text message could be obtained. An example of a typical weekly message was *The second stage of labour is prolonged if it lasts more than 45 minutes in a primipara or 30 minutes in a multipara*. Messages were taken from evidence-based information used in current midwifery practice.

Chances are, if your cell phone signalled that you had a message early each Tuesday morning, it was from the Sister Lillian Centre.

Twenty six weekly messages covering antenatal, intrapartum and postpartum topics were sent out during the first six months of 2011 to over 2600 midwives. The list of cell phone numbers was taken from the Sensitive Midwifery database provided by the Sister Lillian Centre. The essential messages from the Perinatal Education Programme were supplied by the publisher (Electric Book Works), and the project was funded by Eduhealthcare. The average cost per week for one message to one midwife was 34 cents. A total of 70 000 messages were sent over the course of the project.

To assess if the messages were how helpful, 25 midwives in the private sector and 25 in the public sector were randomly selected and then phoned by an independent evaluator who asked seven structured questions. Each question had three possible answers from positive to negative. Only one midwife refused to answer questions. Comments and suggestions were also recorded.

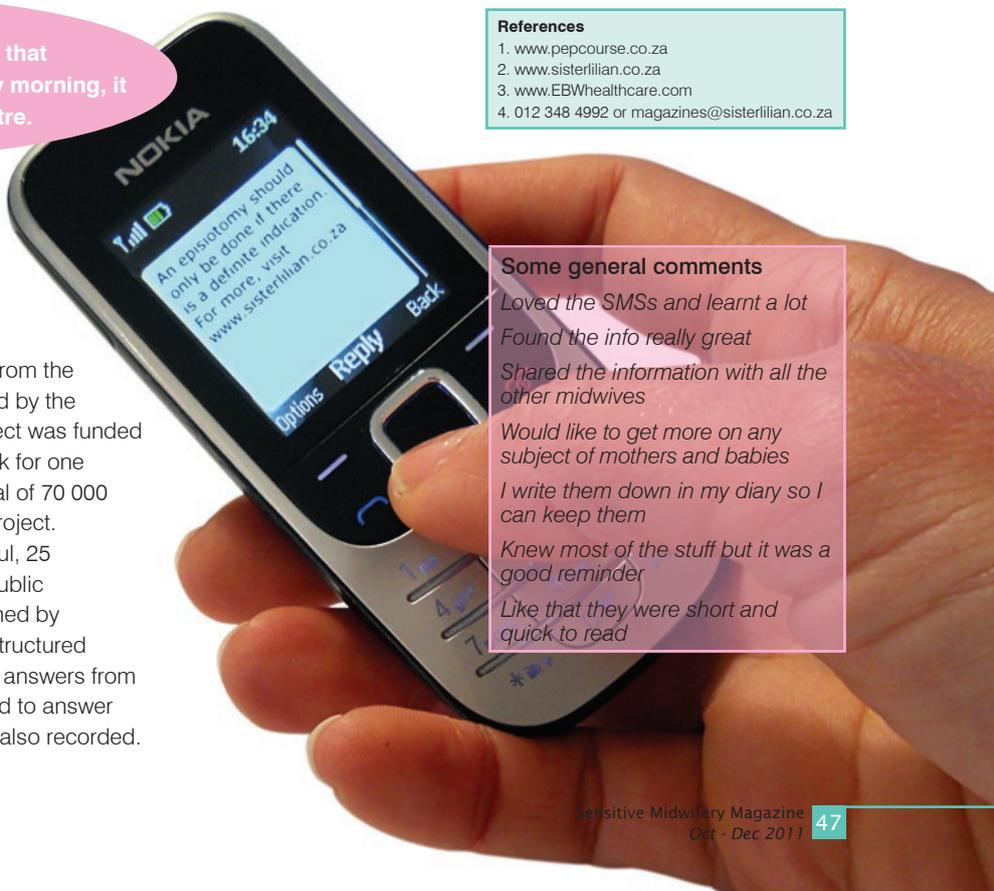
On the plus side

- 86% answered Yes to the question, *Did you enjoy and learn from the weekly text messages?*
- 72% answered Yes to the question, *Did the information improve your clinical practice?*
- 68% answered Yes to the question, *Did you share and discuss the information with your colleagues?*
- 98% thought that PEP books improved their practice of midwifery.
- 84% midwives have or plan to buy a Maternal Care book.
- All the midwives contacted would like to receive further text messages on other topics of maternal and newborn care.

On the down side

32% of midwives (44% of public and 20% of private midwives) do not have access to the internet, limiting the potential use of internet-based learning, especially for the public sector midwives. Some found the messages *too basic or too short and wanted more in depth information*. It must be noted that it was to address this problem that each message was linked to the website containing the contents of the Maternal Care book.

It is concluded that this method of providing continuing education was very well-received, it is likely to improve clinical practice and encouraged midwives to discuss important lessons with colleagues, hence promoting an interest in self-learning. Funding is now needed to extend the project to cover newborn care, perinatal HIV and other important topics. In addition, it is planned to determine the impact of text messages on the quality of midwives' knowledge and patient care. Midwives interested in receiving maternal and newborn care messages in future should contact Sensitive Midwifery Magazine⁴. 



References

1. www.pepcourse.co.za
2. www.sisterlillian.co.za
3. www.EBWhealthcare.com
4. 012 348 4992 or magazines@sisterlillian.co.za

Some general comments

- Loved the SMSs and learnt a lot*
- Found the info really great*
- Shared the information with all the other midwives*
- Would like to get more on any subject of mothers and babies*
- I write them down in my diary so I can keep them*
- Knew most of the stuff but it was a good reminder*
- Like that they were short and quick to read*