

Benefits of Aromatherapy in Labour

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An Investigation into the Use of Aromatherapy in Intrapartum Midwifery Practice

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Abstract

Objective: The principal aim of the study was to examine the contribution of aromatherapy to the promotion of maternal comfort during labor and as a tool to improve the quality of midwifery care.

Design: Evaluative study.

Setting: Delivery suite in a large British teaching hospital with approximately 6,500 deliveries per annum.

Subjects: A total of 8,058 mothers were evaluated between 1990 and 1998.

Interventions: Women were offered aromatherapy to relieve anxiety, pain, nausea and/or vomiting or to strengthen contractions. Routine data collected on the use of aromatherapy over the period were analyzed. Data from the unit audit were used to provide a comparison group of mothers not given aromatherapy (n = 15,799) from the study center.

Outcome measures: Outcome measures include mothers' ratings of effectiveness, outcomes of labor, use of pharmacologic pain relief, uptake of intravenous oxytocin, reported associated symptoms, and annual costs.

Results: The use of aromatherapy during childbirth was an increasingly popular care option with mothers and midwives. More than 50% of mothers rated it as helpful, and only 14% found it unhelpful. The use of aromatherapy was not confined to low-risk mothers. Sixty percent of the sample were primigravidae, and 32% overall had had their labor induced. The administration of aromatherapy in childbirth did appear to reduce the need for additional pain relief in a proportion of mothers. More than 8% of primigravidae and 18% of multigravidae used no conventional pain relief during labor after using essential oils. During the years of the study, the use of pethidine in the study center declined from 6% to 0.2% of women. The study also showed that aromatherapy may have the potential to augment labor contractions for women in dysfunctional labour. A very low number of associated adverse symptoms were reported (1%).

Conclusion: This study represents a successful example of the integration of a complementary therapy into mainstream midwifery practice and forms a basis for future research.

The full report of this study is available from LiebertPub.com

Author information

Ethel E. Burns, P.G.Dip., D.P.S.M., R.M.

Oxford Centre for Health Care Research and Development Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Caroline Blamey, M.I.S.P.A., R.M.

Oxford Radcliffe National Health Service Hospital Trust, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Steven J. Ersser, Ph.D. (Lond.), R.G.N.

School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom.

Lin Barnettson, M.A.

University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Andrew J. Lloyd, D.Phil. (York)

Oxford Centre for Health Care Research and Development Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, United Kingdom.