

## **Opening Message at the Second MCH Handbook Webinar**

May 27, 2021

Dear participants,

It is my great pleasure to talk with you online at this second webinar on Maternal and Child Health Handbooks today. Also, I am very grateful to everyone who has been organizing this series of webinars, to the Local Organizing Committee of the 12th International Conference on the MCH Handbook in the Netherlands, to the University of Amsterdam, to the Public Health Service of Amsterdam, and to the International Committee on the MCH Handbook.

MCH Handbooks have been playing a very important role for pregnant women, nursing mothers, children and their families. They have been improved through the creativity and efforts of many people. For example, descriptions and illustrations relating to pregnancy, childbirth and child health have been revised so that they will be better understood by local residents, better reflecting the user's point of view. I fondly remember the MCH Handbooks of Thailand, shown to us in 2018, when I participated in the 11th International Conference on Maternal and Child Health Handbook in Bangkok. In the same year, I had an opportunity to visit a center for parents and children in the Netherlands, where I learned about Dutch MCH Handbooks and the mobile application for parents.

In February this year, I had a fruitful time attending the first webinar. I was very impressed by the presentations on the utilization of MCH Handbooks to support people in the difficult environment caused by COVID-19.

I would like to express my deep respect to all of you who have been working hard with MCH Handbooks, improving the health of pregnant women, nursing mothers and children. Please take good care of yourselves, and continue your valuable contributions.

Today's webinar is on the theme of "Reaching out to vulnerable pregnant women and their partners, preventing early life stress". Pregnant women may feel confused about their mental and physical changes, and become anxious or depressed. Understanding from their partner is important, but it is sometimes not easy. In order to allow all pregnant women to give

birth with confidence, and to care warmly for their children, with their partners, it is very important to identify and support vulnerable pregnant women and their partners from an early stage.

I believe that it starts with listening to pregnant women and their partners. I have taken some training classes about perinatal mental health together with medical professionals in the organization of which I am the President, and I have had other occasions to listen to public health nurses who care for pregnant women and mothers with difficulties. Also, members of local volunteer groups in Japan called “Aiikuhan” tell me about their activities in which they support parents and children. These experiences convinced me of the importance of listening with empathy. MCH Handbooks can provide opportunities for promoting this sort of good communication.

MCH Handbooks not only empower women and their partners by providing home-based records, but also help medical and welfare professionals to support them. For example, when a pregnant woman receives an MCH Handbook, or when she has medical check-ups, conversations about the use of the MCH handbook may increase opportunities for these professionals to become aware of risks and difficulties that might otherwise have been overlooked. I strongly feel that utilizing MCH Handbooks can be a valuable step forward in promoting support for vulnerable pregnant women and their partners.

During the continued COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant women are likely to feel more stress. I think this stress can be reduced by collaboration with medical and welfare experts and local volunteers, using MCH handbooks. It would be wonderful if every pregnant woman received an MCH Handbook, and any pregnant woman feeling anxious, depressed, or at risk, were quickly identified and received proper support. I believe it would prevent various problems from occurring.

In today’s webinar, I hope that we will have valuable experiences, share information with each other, and have discussions together, so that every child will be able to grow up and build a bright future.

Thank you very much.