



# THE PRACTICE DOCTORATE IN MIDWIFERY

## Introduction

The discipline of midwifery has a long and rich history of care to women and their families. To continue this tradition, those practicing midwifery have an obligation to remain responsive to changing healthcare needs in an increasingly complex healthcare environment. In order to develop leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies that foster changes to improve the health care and outcomes of women and newborns, professionals in the field of midwifery are called upon to expand opportunities for education at the highest levels of midwifery practice.

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) is the professional organization for midwives educated directly in midwifery or dually in nursing and midwifery and is responsible for ensuring that high-quality education programs are available in midwifery. ACNM defines midwifery practice as “the independent management of women’s health care, focusing particularly on common primary care issues, family planning and gynecologic needs of women, pregnancy, childbirth, the postpartum period and the care of the newborn.”<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this document, midwifery practice includes clinical practice, education, administration, research, and public service, where the work of midwives promotes the health of women and newborns.

Although ACNM endorses a minimum of a master’s degree as basic preparation for midwifery practice, it recognizes the need to develop competencies for midwifery education at the doctoral level and supports a variety of doctoral degree options for midwives.<sup>2</sup> When midwifery education is offered in programs that award the Doctor of Nursing Practice or similar practice degree, ACNM is responsible for ensuring that the midwifery body of knowledge is clearly represented in the curriculum. Programs that educate midwives at the doctoral level must provide a rigorous curriculum that gives students a solid foundation of leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to assess and improve health care processes and outcomes. Post-baccalaureate students must also attain the Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice, and the program should provide opportunities to implement this knowledge and these skills and competencies in a focused area of interest.

The ACNM Division of Education established a task force to develop recommendations for competencies for the practice doctorate in midwifery. (In some institutions, the practice doctorate may be called the professional doctorate.) This document uses the International Confederation of Midwives definition of competency: “A combination of knowledge, professional behavior and specific skills that are demonstrated at a defined level of proficiency in the context of midwifery education and practice.”<sup>3</sup> These recommendations may be used to guide educators who are developing doctoral programs and will be available to the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education to inform the development of criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programs in midwifery. The task force has agreed that such competencies should be the following:

- Developed under the unifying theme of leadership;
- Focused on developing the knowledge, skills and competencies to assess and improve healthcare processes and outcomes;
- Useful and relevant to midwifery practice;
- Flexible enough to support a variety of tracks/options for midwifery doctoral study;
- Applicable to all practice-focused doctorates for midwives, regardless of the credential awarded (excluding the PhD);
- International in perspective.

The ultimate goal of midwifery education and practice, both at the doctoral and master's levels, is improvement in the health and well-being of women throughout the lifespan and newborns. Midwives who earn a practice doctorate will be prepared to be leaders who identify problems, set agendas, and initiate changes that contribute to such improvement and to the advancement of the discipline of midwifery.

### **Competencies for the Practice Doctorate in Midwifery**

After successfully completing a practice doctorate in midwifery, the graduate will be prepared to assume a leadership role in a variety of aspects of midwifery practice. To achieve that outcome, the graduate will be able to do the following:

1. Translate expert clinical knowledge and research relevant to midwifery into best practice models.
2. Develop, implement and evaluate projects to improve women's health care.
3. Interpret and apply research related to the national and international distribution and determinants of health and disease of women and newborns.
4. Evaluate women's health policy issues within a variety of jurisdictions (local to federal), and demonstrate the ability to develop remedies to promote health improvement for women and newborns.
5. Use effective communication and leadership skills to enhance team function and promote positive change in the health care of women and newborns.
6. Analyze theories relevant to the discipline of midwifery, and apply these theories to inform and evaluate the health care of women and newborns.
7. Evaluate and use information systems and other technologies to improve the quality and safety of health care for women and newborns.
8. Analyze and compare health care delivery and finance models to improve health outcomes for women and newborns.
9. Develop expertise and share knowledge in a selected area of midwifery practice or scholarship.

## REFERENCES

1. American College of Nurse Midwives. Definition of midwifery practice. Position statement. [http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/position/Def\\_of\\_Mid\\_Prac\\_CNM\\_CM\\_05.pdf](http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/position/Def_of_Mid_Prac_CNM_CM_05.pdf). Accessed October 4, 2011.
2. American College of Nurse Midwives. Midwifery education and the doctor of nursing practice (DNP). Position statement. <http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000079/Midwifery%20Ed%20and%20DNP%207.09.pdf>. Accessed October 4, 2011.
3. International Confederation of Midwives. Essential competencies for basic midwifery practice 2010. [http://www.unfpa.org/sowmy/resources/docs/standards/en/R430\\_ICM\\_2011\\_Essential\\_Competencies\\_2010\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sowmy/resources/docs/standards/en/R430_ICM_2011_Essential_Competencies_2010_ENG.pdf). Published 2011. Accessed October 5, 2011.

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