



February 26, 2009

Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN
Center for Rural Health
University of North Dakota
PO Box 9037
Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037

Dear Dr. Wakefield:

On behalf of the American College of Nurse-Midwives, hearty congratulations to you on your appointment by President Obama to head the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)! As committed supporters of HRSA's mission to improve access to health care services for people who are uninsured, isolated or medically vulnerable, we look forward to meeting with you at your earliest opportunity.

We are thrilled at the President's decision to choose a nurse to lead this important agency. Your expertise in rural health issues, quality and patient safety will be invaluable to HRSA in the coming effort to achieve meaningful health care reform and increase the number of health care providers in areas where they are desperately needed.

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) continue to attend an increasing number of births in the US. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, CNMs attended more than 317,000 births in 2006—an all-time high. CNMs and CMs are also on the front lines in providing primary care to women in vulnerable and underserved populations, and we see firsthand the difficulties women and their families face every day in trying to navigate the US health care system.

ACNM is concerned about the emerging shortage of maternity and primary care providers. Some hospitals are closing their labor and delivery units, leaving women with fewer choices and often longer travel times to give birth. We are also concerned that, even when adjusted for the difference in racial and income disparities, the US infant mortality rate is significantly higher than other industrialized nations where midwives provide the majority of maternity care. These challenges will require an ongoing focus on the development of evidence-based and cost effective solutions.

Again, the ACNM community celebrates your appointment and welcomes the opportunity to work with you to address these challenges, and support your and HRSA's success!

Sincerely,

Melissa D. Avery, PhD, CNM, FACNM, FAAN
President, ACNM

Lorrie Kline Kaplan
Executive Director