

Scope of Practice

The Department of Professional Services at the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) is often asked questions regarding the scope of practice of midwives.

“What is the scope of practice of a midwife?”

“Is it within the scope of practice for a midwife to _____?”

This *QuickInfo* lists ACNM documents that provide an essential foundation for answering these questions and provides additional resources that will be useful to midwives and others concerned with these questions.

What determines scope of practice?

Two essential ACNM documents described below provide the foundation for defining the CNM/CMs scope of practice: 1) *Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice*, and 2) *Standards for the Practice of Midwifery*. State laws and regulations also play a role in determining scope of practice. The relatively specific list of clinical diagnosis cared for or procedures performed that most people are looking for when asking questions about scope of practice is contained in the clinical practice guidelines of the individual midwife or midwifery practice. As described below, *it is the clinical practice guidelines that define the individual midwife’s scope of practice*.

The Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice

This document delineates the fundamental knowledge, skills, and behaviors expected of a new practitioner. The focus, as highlighted in the title, is *basic* midwifery practice. The curriculum in all ACNM Division of Accreditation accredited education programs is based on the Core Competencies. *Expanded midwifery practices* consists of those procedures or components of practice, such as serving as first assistant at surgery, use of vacuum extractor, and performing circumcision that may be acquired beyond basic midwifery education and are addressed in the *QuickInfo*, “Expanded Midwifery Practice.” The Core Competencies are available on the ACNM web site at: http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/descriptive/Core_Competencies_6_07_3.pdf.

Standards for the Practice of Midwifery

The *Standards for the Practice of Midwifery* (ACNM, 2003) mandate the development of practice guidelines. Specifically, Standard V states that “midwifery care is based upon knowledge, skills, and judgments which are reflected in written practice guidelines.” Realizing that practice would evolve and that individual and institutional differences would influence decisions regarding expanding practice beyond the Core Competencies, ACNM developed *Guidelines for the Incorporation of New Procedures into Midwifery Practice* in the early 1970s. These guidelines were incorporated into the *Standards* (as Standard VIII) in 2003. They provide a mechanism for evaluating the need for a particular procedure, establishing a process for education, and evaluating and maintaining competency. The Standards are available on the ACNM web site at: http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/education/Standards_Practice_Midwifery_2003.pdf.

Legal Guidelines

The *Standards* direct the midwife to ensure that no institutional, state or federal statutes, regulations or bylaws might constrain the midwife from incorporation of a particular procedure. *Summaries of State Laws and Regulations Affecting CNMs/CMs* addresses state laws and regulations that may define the scope of practice of a midwife. These summaries are available to members only at <http://www.midwife.org/today.cfm>. Some state laws explicitly reference the ACNM Standards thereby permitting advanced practice procedures consistent with the guidelines.

Clinical Practice Guidelines

Though ACNM publishes a number of clinical bulletins, clinical practice statements and handbooks that can assist midwives in the development of clinical practice guidelines (see the document in this series, Clinical Practice Guidelines) ACNM does not publish clinical practice guidelines. Rather, individual midwives and/or practices establish specific guidelines to describe the parameters for midwifery management, physician management and collaborative management that are appropriate for the individual clinician and practice setting. Practice guidelines are established for each specialty area, which include but are not limited to antepartum, intrapartum, postpartum/newborn, and family planning/gynecology.

ACNM is often asked for guidelines regarding client selection and management; eg. *At what gestational age may a midwife care for a patient?* or *Must a client with twins (or diabetes or any number of conditions) be collaboratively managed or referred?* Such decisions – and the development of guidelines that address such decisions – are best made by the individual midwifery practice. In defining their scope of practice and the populations served, individual midwives will consider many factors, including

- the clinical setting in which care is provided
- the skills and expertise of the individual midwife or midwives
- the skills and expertise of the consultant physician(s)
- legal parameters under which they practice

Bibliography

ACNM Education Committee. Core competencies in nurse-midwifery: expected outcomes of nurse-midwifery education. *J Nurse Midwifery* 1979; 24:32-36. (*describes the development of the Core Competencies, beginning with a recommendation by nurse-midwifery educators in 1973, and was the initial publication of the Core Competencies as approved by the ACNM Board of Directors in February 1978.*)

Roberts J, Sedler KD. The Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice: critical ACNM document revised. *J Nurse Midwifery* 1997; 42:371-372. (*describes the third major revision of the Core Competencies*)

Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health (JMWH) Home Study Program (HSP)

A HSP on Clinical Parameters of Midwifery Practice was published in the JMWH, Vol.45, No. 6 November/December 2000. Articles in this special issue address a variety of questions related to scope of practice. Although continuing education credit is no longer available for this HSP, it does include important background information and much of the content remains relevant to current practice. JMWH is a peer-reviewed journal published bi-monthly by the ACNM. All ACNM members receive a subscription to the journal as a member benefit. Single issues, both current and back, exist in limited quantities and are offered for sale subject to availability. Reprints/back issues may be obtained by contacting Elsevier Science: 1-888-4ES-INFO (437-4636), 212-633-3680 (fax) or usinfo-f@elsevier.com.

* The ACNM Resource Catalog is available at www.midwife.org, or contact us at the phone number below and request that a Catalog be mailed to you.

The *QuickInfo* series was developed by the Dept. of Professional Services to respond to common inquiries, summarizing ACNM resources regarding a particular topic, as well as listing selected literature and other resources. Feedback is welcomed; contact Professional Services at 240-485-1800 or info@acnm.org 5/5/03

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