



POSITION STATEMENT

The Certified Nurse-Midwife/Certified Midwife as First Assistant during Surgery

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) affirms the following:

- Acting as the first assistant during obstetric or gynecologic surgery is within the scope of expanded practice of a certified nurse-midwife/certified midwife (CNM/CM).
- The ACNM Standards for the Practice of Midwifery,¹ specifically standard VIII, and the position statement, *Expansion of Midwifery Practice and Skills Beyond Basic Core Competencies*,² provide guidance and outline the steps that CNMs and CMs should follow to prepare for expanded midwifery practice.
- A specific credential external to the midwifery profession is not necessary for the CNM/CM to function as first assistant during obstetric or gynecologic surgery. ACNM standard of practice VIII provides for a competency-based approach to expand skills and practice as a midwife.
- A number of different education and training mechanisms are appropriate to obtain the skill set necessary to practice in the first assistant role during obstetric or gynecologic surgical procedures.
- The Association of PeriOperative Registered Nurses sets standards for advance practice registered nurses other than CNMs/CMs to function in expanded perioperative roles.³

Background

Expanding midwifery practice to include the ability to serve as first assistant during obstetric or gynecologic surgery can promote woman-centered care, enhance continuity of care, improve access to and timeliness of emergency care, and increase the value of the CNM/CM as a member of the health care team. The role of the midwife as first assistant is one of active participation and requires the midwife to function independently in a coordinated and collaborative manner with the surgeon to facilitate a safe surgical procedure.⁴ CNMs/CMs frequently act first assistants during cesarean, and this expanded skill may be required for entry into practice at a given facility.

Advanced education provides CNM/CMs with knowledge and competencies required for first assistants, including patient assessment, anatomy and physiology, principles of wound evaluation and repair, and basic surgical skills such as aseptic technique and suturing. *The Midwife as Surgical First Assistant*⁴ provides a basis for perioperative education, skill development, and guidance regarding the expansion of midwifery practice to include surgical first assistant.

Standard VIII of the Standards for the Practice of Midwifery¹ and the ACNM Position Statement - Expansion of midwifery practice and skills beyond basic core competencies² outline the steps CNMs and CMs must follow to expand scope of practice and gain new technical skills. As with

any expanded midwifery practice skill, performing in the role of first assistant is based on the individual midwife's education, practice situation, and professional interests.

Midwives routinely function in the perioperative setting to provide support and continuity of care. The ability to act as a surgical first assistant is governed by hospital credentialing processes, medical staff regulations, and in some instances state law or regulations. It is appropriate for facilities to encourage midwives to enhance perioperative skills and knowledge via orientation to the operating room and observation or participation in cesarean or other types of surgery. Such observation is concurrent with the educational program. In this way, midwives gain experience and preparation before requesting expanded practice privileges.⁴ Following appropriate education and training and demonstrated competency, midwives may seek privileges to function in the perioperative setting as the surgical assistant with cesarean, tubal ligation, and other obstetric and gynecologic surgery.

Educational Preparation

To assure that midwives who serve as first assistants do so safely within the scope of midwifery practice, ACNM requires that midwives who have not been educated and trained as a first assistants before or during their midwifery education programs

- Follow Standard VIII to gain the knowledge and learn the procedures necessary to demonstrate competency as first assistants at obstetric or gynecologic surgery,
- Document the education, training, and evaluation process, and
- Document competency and continued proficiency; use of an objective assessment tool is recommended.

The steps outlined in Standard VII indicate that CNMs/CMs are responsible for obtaining and documenting their educational processes, which may include but are not limited to independent or formal study, mentored simulation, clinical practice, and comprehensive evaluation. The duration of mentored clinical practice necessary to demonstrate competency is dependent on any prior perioperative experience, volume and type of participation, facility-specific expectations for the scope of the first assistant role, and individual mentoring styles.

Scope of Practice

The activities midwives perform as first assistants are an expansion of autonomous midwifery practice that is executed within the context of active collaborative relationships with the surgeon and other perioperative personnel in a manner supportive of the woman and her family. The scope of perioperative practice for the midwife first assistant includes pre-, intra-, and post-operative care. Components of care may vary based on the midwife's education, clinical experience and expertise, clinical practice site, state licensing statute or rule, and surgeon preference. Effective interprofessional communication and actions to maintain the safety and well being of the patient are integral components of all aspects of perioperative care.

The pre-operative skill set demonstrated by the midwife first assistant may include but is not limited to

- Determining the need for cesarean or other obstetric or gynecologic surgery and obtaining consultations with surgical and anesthesia colleagues
- Performing the preoperative history and physical examination
- Writing preoperative orders
- Participating in the informed consent process and obtaining consent
- Providing support and information

The intra-operative skill set demonstrated by the midwife first assistant may include but is not limited to

- Positioning, preparing, and draping the patient
- Applying surgical aseptic technique
- Using of surgical instruments and devices
- Providing exposure
- Handling and dissection of tissues
- Closing and suturing wounds
- Providing hemostasis
- Initiating emergency actions as indicated

The postoperative skill set demonstrated by the midwife first assistant may include but is not limited to

- Initiating immediate postoperative orders
- Performing postoperative rounds and initiating orders
- Identifying postoperative complications, triaging, and obtaining consultation when indicated
- Following-up after discharge

Credentialing

The medical staff office of each facility is encouraged to formulate a uniform process and expectations to include surgical first assistant privileges as part of midwifery practice. When a midwife seeks to include first assistant, the midwife is expected to obtain and provide evidence of relevant education, training, and competency consistent with this position statement.

REFERENCES

1. American College of Nurse-Midwives. Standards for the practice of midwifery. http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000051/Standards_for_Practice_of_Midwifery_Sept_2011.pdf. Published September 24, 2011. Accessed September 25, 2017.
2. American College of Nurse-Midwives. Expansion of midwifery practice and skills beyond basic core competencies. <http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000066/Expansion-of-Midwifery-Practice-June-2015.pdf>. Updated June, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2017.

3. Association of periOperative Registered Nurses. AORN position statement on APRNs in the perioperative environment. *AORN J.* 2015;101(3):354–356.
4. Tharpe NL. *The Midwife as Surgical First Assistant.* 2nd ed. Silver Spring, MD: American College of Nurse Midwives; 2015.
5. American College of Nurse Midwives. Core competencies for basic midwifery practice. <http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000050/Core%20Comptencies%20Dec%202012.pdf>. Published December 2012. Accessed September 25, 2017.

Note. Midwifery as used throughout this document refers to the education and practice of certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) who have been certified by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB).

Source: Division of Standards & Practice

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