



# POSITION STATEMENT

## Midwifery Education and Doctoral Preparation

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) maintains that competency-based education is the core of midwifery education, and a master's degree is required for the practice of midwifery.<sup>1</sup> While recognizing the value of doctoral preparation in midwifery, nursing, public health, and other related fields, it is the position of ACNM that a doctoral degree should not be a requirement for entry into midwifery practice.

### Background

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) are prepared to serve women and childbearing families, provide leadership, and take political action to improve health care locally, nationally, and globally. Midwifery education programs have evolved to include many options for graduate degrees, including but not limited to master's degrees in the disciplines of nursing, midwifery, and public health and a wide variety of doctoral degrees (PhD, DNS, DrPH, EdD, JD, DMP, and DNP). Any of these options for graduate education can provide competency-based, midwifery education.

Currently the United States is experiencing a maternity care workforce shortage,<sup>2</sup> and midwives play significant roles in filling the maternity care provider gap. Many midwifery education programs require 2 years of postbaccalaureate study before the midwife can begin to practice. Midwifery education programs accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME) in the United States meet the global standards for education of midwives set by the International Confederation of Midwives.<sup>3</sup> Decades of evidence suggest that graduates from ACME-accredited midwifery education programs, regardless of terminal degree, provide safe and cost-effective maternity and women's health care.<sup>4</sup>

No evidence exists to demonstrate that doctoral preparation for midwifery practice increases the ability to practice safely as a midwife. Recent data demonstrate no difference in compensation between master's prepared and doctorally prepared nurse-midwives.<sup>5</sup> Data are also lacking regarding the potential effects of a required doctorate on the applicant pool and the cost to the health care system. The requirement of an additional degree will result in a substantive increase in expense and time for students and educational institutions. At a time when ACNM seeks to increase the diversity of the midwifery workforce to better match the diversity of the individuals for whom care is provided, the additional time and expense of a required doctoral degree may limit applicants from diverse backgrounds or resource-limited and rural environments.<sup>6,7</sup> Furthermore, to reduce the current trend in maternal mortality and morbidity,<sup>8</sup> amidst a critical shortage of midwives and other women's health care providers, the requirement of a doctoral degree would increase the length of time to completion, certification, and clinical practice.

ACNM has set the standard for education programs for CNMs since 1962 and for CMs since

1997. The clinical competence of entry-level midwives needed to practice safely is ensured by several mechanisms:

- Entry-level competencies that must be met in all education programs are standardized in the ACNM document "Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice,"<sup>9</sup> which is updated periodically.
- That graduate midwifery programs in the United States be accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME). Since 1982, ACME has been officially recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a programmatic accrediting agency for midwifery education programs. The mission of ACME is to advance excellence in midwifery education. The accreditation process is a voluntary, quality assurance activity conducted by the educational institution and ACME that combines self-assessment and peer evaluation. The U.S. Department of Education has granted ACME with the following scope: "the accreditation and pre-accreditation of basic certificate, basic graduate nurse-midwifery, direct entry midwifery, and pre-certification nurse-midwifery education programs, including those programs that offer distance education."<sup>10</sup>
- All midwifery graduates must pass a certification examination. The American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB) is responsible for developing and administering the national certification examination. AMCB is a member of the National Organization for Certifying Agencies and is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

The standards for midwifery education, accreditation, and certification have been and continue to be carefully updated, monitored, and maintained by ACNM, ACME and AMCB. Evidence demonstrates positive outcomes for women and newborns associated with the care provided by CM/CNMs with the current requirement of a master's degree for entry to practice.<sup>12,13</sup> Therefore, ACNM does not support the requirement of a doctoral degree for entry to practice.

## REFERENCES

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*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, Inc. (AMCB).

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