



POSITION STATEMENT

Ultrasound in Midwifery Practice

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

- It is within the scope of midwifery practice for certified midwives/certified nurse-midwives (CM/CNMs) to perform ultrasound examinations.^{1,2}
- Performance of ultrasound examinations can be incorporated into midwifery practice by following the Standards for the Practice of Midwifery,² which delineates the requirements for expanding midwifery skills beyond those outlined in the Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice.^{3,4}
- Midwives who wish to incorporate ultrasound examinations into their scopes of clinical practice should have appropriate education and training, acquire the necessary skills, and demonstrate the specific competencies to master the modality.^{4,5}
- Education and training for ultrasound can be incorporated into CNM/CM education programs as an added skill beyond those required in the Core Competencies,⁴ or they can be obtained on a continuing education basis following a structured curriculum.
- Midwives who perform ultrasound examinations following appropriate education and training should be eligible for reimbursement for these services.
- State regulations and licensing related to midwifery scope of practice should allow for CNMs/CMs to perform ultrasound examinations, interpret findings, and implement management strategies commensurate with their education and training.

Background

Many CNMs/CMs perform obstetric and/or gynecologic ultrasound examinations, and related practice guidelines have been published by professional organizations: American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM);⁵ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and AIUM;⁶ and Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN).⁷ ACNM has collaborated with these various organizations to develop guidelines and scope of practice documents that outline the use of ultrasound in midwifery practice. These documents provide expert, evidence-based guidelines for the skill development and didactic education necessary to ensure competent performance of ultrasound examinations.

Ultrasound education programs should include training on the following:

- Physics and instrumentation,
- Required elements for the type of examination as described by AIUM,⁵ ACOG & AIUM,⁶ or AWHONN,⁷
- Required anatomic landmarks,
- Indications for use,
- Clinical implications of normal and abnormal findings,

- Ultrasound safety,
- Components of a complete ultrasound report,
- Patient education, and
- Process of informed consent regarding the scope and limitations of type of examination.

With appropriate additional training as outlined by AIUM,⁵ ACOG & AIUM,⁶ or AWHONN,⁷ midwives may perform ultrasound examinations within the scope of midwifery practice. Obstetric ultrasound examination may be performed in all trimesters of pregnancy to obtain specific information related to gestational age, fetal well-being, and length of cervix. Ultrasound may also be performed at the point-of-care to gain specific information pertinent to assessment of the woman or her fetus to aid in clinical decision-making.^{7,8}

Basic gynecologic ultrasound may be used to recognize the normal uterus and ovaries and common variations of normal. Measurement of the endometrial stripe and location of an IUD are routine indications for point of care gynecologic scanning. Recognition of pelvic masses may be the reason for consultation or referral. For midwives engaged in assisted reproductive techniques, it is necessary to determine the number and size of ovarian follicles. Ultrasound examination may also be used to identify and assess early pregnancy.

It is not necessary for midwives to achieve competency in all types of ultrasound; they may tailor education and training to the specific type(s) of examination they wish to perform. They may seek certification for full scope of practice for point of care practice sites. In collaboration with ACNM, the American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonography has developed a Midwife Sonography Certificate.⁹

When incorporating ultrasound into clinical practice, appropriate education, credentialing, consultation, collaboration, and referral for abnormal findings must be established in accordance with state law and included in practice guidelines. Beyond the specific skills and knowledge for performing ultrasound examinations in clinical practice, midwives should be versed in the process of informed consent to describe the limitations, benefits, and risks of performing varied types of examinations to their patients, including what information is gained or not gained.¹⁰

Midwives who wish to perform technically advanced, ultrasound evaluations, such as nuchal translucencies and fetal anatomic surveys, may wish to seek expanded certification through the American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers and the Fetal Medicine Foundation. Depending on individual state laws, it can be within the scope of practice for CNMs/CMs to interpret and report findings, initiate clinical management based on findings, and bill for insurance reimbursement.

Ultrasound has been used extensively in pregnancy for the past 20 years, and in population based studies there was no indication that prudent use by trained health care providers increased risk of fetal or maternal harm.¹¹ Mechanical effects such as cavitation and thermal effects such as increased heat in dense tissues should be reduced by adhering to the principle of As Low As Reasonably Achievable.⁵ Frequent or extended exposure to ultrasound should be reserved for circumstances in which the benefit outweighs the potential risk; ultrasound should be used only

when medically indicated.¹¹

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).

Source: Division of Standards and Practice, Task Force for Midwives Performance of Ultrasound
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