



Strengthening Midwifery Globally

Heritage and culture in childbearing

Position statement

BACKGROUND

Childbirth is a significant social and emotional event, not only for an individual, but for that person's family and perhaps the whole community. The care given by a midwife should take into consideration the individual woman's cultural and social needs in her own environment. The World Health Report 2005 states that 'There is a value in the rituals surrounding birth, and in keeping these as a central feature of family life.'

Attitudes and activities that are associated with these aspects of birth, within the family and community, are usually aimed to provide help and support for the mother and baby, as well as celebrating the event. Midwives may be expected or invited to take part in the activities around birth, or they may leave the family in privacy. Part of appropriate maternity care is the midwife being aware of what is planned and how best to enable the family to carry this out.

Occasionally, the midwife may become aware of a cultural practice that appears to be harmful to the mother or baby.

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

The ICM believes that culture, tradition and individual beliefs influence how one lives and makes choices in life. The ICM believes that midwives, and the women and families they care for, deserve respect and the freedom to participate fully and knowledgeably in decisions that affect their lives. The Confederation also holds the belief that in every culture there exists the possibility of harmful traditions imposed on young girls and women, and is therefore committed to working in partnership with women to change these harmful practices.

POSITION

The Confederation promotes the full participation of people of all cultures in the development of health policies, and the planning and implementation of health services during childbearing that are safe, acceptable, and available and used. This participation is based on respect for human dignity and a partnership model of professional midwifery practice.

In recognition of the variety of cultural traditions and practices surrounding pregnancy and birth, the midwife will:

- be knowledgeable about such traditions and respect those practices that will not cause harm to women and childbearing families;
- in instances where such practices can cause harm: work with the community

to eliminate the harmful practices;

- in partnership with women and childbearing families: provide leadership in establishing and maintaining maternity services that are culturally safe and free from discrimination.

GUIDANCE TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Member associations are encouraged to work with midwives, women, policy makers and the community to implement culturally safe health services, using this resolution as a basis for action.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS

- ICM International Code of Ethics for Midwives (1993)
- ICM Philosophy and Model of Midwifery Care (2005)
- ICM position statement. Appropriate Maternity Services for Normal Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Postnatal Period. ICM, 2002.

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

- World Health Report 2005. Make every mother and child count. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, 2005.
- United Nations Human Rights Study Series #10: Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People (1997)

Adopted at Brisbane Council meeting, 2005

Due for next review 2011