



Strengthening Midwifery Globally

Appropriate use of intervention in childbirth

BACKGROUND

Childbearing, for the great majority of women throughout the world, is a normal, physiological event, whose process is influenced by culture, traditions, religion and psychosocial factors. For many women in the resource-poor nations of the world, however, pregnancy and birth can be life-threatening and the risk of death or illness may be reduced through the use of evidence-based, technological interventions when needed.

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

ICM supports the belief that childbearing, for the great majority of women throughout the world, is a normal, physiological process. ICM further believes that childbearing is a family event and requires a health-oriented rather than a disease-oriented model of care from providers.

In keeping with the ICM's *International Code of Ethics for Midwives*, the ICM also believes that women are active participants in decisions that affect their health services. Making informed decisions about the use or non-use of technology in childbirth requires that women have up-to-date, complete and understandable information on the risks and benefits of each technological intervention proposed in their care.

POSITION

In keeping with the basic premise that childbirth is a normal, life-cycle event for the majority of women, midwives will use technology during childbirth only when indicated, to enhance the well-being of mothers and babies and improve outcomes. Therefore, the midwife will:

- provide information to women and their families that promotes the understanding of birth as a normal life process and enables women to make informed choices during health care
- promote childbirth practices that enhance the normal physiological processes of labour and birth as well as the psychological, spiritual and cultural aspects
- advocate for the fair allocation of health resources that support the basic needs of women and their babies as priorities
- participate in the design and evaluation of interventions during childbirth, including the ethical use of technology, according to the following criteria:
 - when there is a clear and present danger to the health of mother or baby that can be removed by using technology
 - when the benefits of its use outweigh the risks to mother or baby or both
 - when both the midwife and the woman/family fully understand how the

technology works and why it is indicated

- when the woman has been given complete and understandable information about the proposed technological intervention and can therefore give fully informed consent to proceed.

A midwife will also:

- take measures to avoid unnecessary interference in the progress of normal labour and birth
- understand and implement life-saving skills, including the use of technology, in a timely and appropriate manner when there is a clear and present danger to the health of pregnant women and/or their babies.

GUIDANCE TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Member Associations are urged to use this statement or draft a similar one that highlights the midwife's role, in partnership with women, in both the use and evaluation of any technological intervention during the care of women and their newborn.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS

- ICM International Code of Ethics for Midwives (1993)
- ICM Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice (2002)
- ICM Philosophy and Model of Midwifery Care (2005)

Adopted at Brisbane Council meeting, 2005

Due for next review 2011