



Strengthening Midwifery Globally

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL MIDWIVES AND TRADITIONAL CAREGIVERS WITH MIDWIFERY SKILLS

Position statement

BACKGROUND

There has been discussion internationally over many years about how midwifery can best influence and/or recognise the different education and regulation pathways taken to provide competent midwifery services to women and their newborn. ICM promotes regulation as the preferred pathway to develop midwifery competency. The non-regulated traditional caregivers struggle to find their place in this formal educated and regulated environment. It is essential that ICM guides the thinking to ensure the development of pathways that recognise all cultures and their efforts to provide women and their babies with birth care.

Any decision on the role, function and effectiveness of traditional caregivers must not undermine the gains achieved in many countries in the education and regulation of midwives. These regulatory frameworks are the result of societies recognising and lifting the status of women *and* midwives. They recognise that women are entitled to a competent health service and that midwives (mostly women) are also entitled to the education and skills required to make effective clinical judgments and provide competent midwifery care.

Recognition of women as human persons with rights is the first step in all women's rights campaigns and it forms the basis of the recognition of midwifery as a profession. This means that midwifery, as a woman-dominated profession, must find maternity care solutions that protect the rights of women *and* midwives. In all higher-income countries, the importance of primary health, health promotion and disease prevention is increasingly seen as the driving force to improving total health systems including women's health. Many traditional midwifery services follow that primary health model. Primary health means empowering people to know their own health needs by offering education and a supportive environment to make the choices that influence their health and wellbeing. Where traditional caregivers are the main primary health care providers to pregnant women in the community they are an essential part of that society's development of formal midwifery practice and regulation.

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

A partnership between all regulated midwives and traditional caregivers, regardless of their route to midwifery knowledge, not only reflects the midwifery philosophy of partnership with women, but is more likely to result in a higher level of education for all women and midwives. Supporting each other as women health workers is also important if we are to avoid undermining the benefits gained in many countries for

both women and midwives from formal midwifery education. Traditional midwifery knowledge can also be protected and incorporated into formal midwifery education if it is valued and understood.

POSITION

Linking or forming partnerships between registered/regulated/licensed midwives and traditional caregivers has the potential to improve significantly the health outcomes for pregnant and birthing women and their babies.

Key components to successful partnerships include:

- Ensuring community involvement in all midwifery and maternity services, especially listening to mothers themselves
- Accepting that community needs of developing countries are as varied as those in developed countries
- Mutual recognition and respect of the knowledge and wisdom each have, sharing education opportunities
- Sustained support and direction from ministries of health and international development agencies
- Maintaining functioning referral and transportation systems
- Recognition of beneficial practices from both paradigms or perspectives
- Inclusion of cultural competency in the curricula of health care providers
- Appropriate education programmes and support for traditional caregivers who choose the 'professional' midwifery pathway
- Recognition that the titles/terms used in different cultures to describe traditional caregivers may suggest different preparation and skill bases.

GUIDING STATEMENT TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS:

This statement can guide member associations to identify ways in which professional midwives and traditional caregivers can work together to develop regulation and education pathways that improve maternal and perinatal health outcomes without disempowering each others' knowledge and skill base.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS

ICM. Code of Ethics. ICM, 2008

ICM. Essential Competencies For Basic Midwifery Practice. ICM, 2002

ICM. Definition of the Midwife. ICM, 2005

ICM. Position Statement. Heritage and Culture in Childbearing. ICM, 2005

ICM. Position Statement. Legislation to Govern Midwifery practice. ICM, 2005.

ICM. Position statement. Basic and Ongoing Education For Midwives. ICM, 2005

ICM. Position Statement. Partnership between Women and Midwives. ICM, 2005

ICM. Position Statement. The Midwife is the First-Choice Health Professional For Child bearing women. ICM, 2005.

Adopted at Glasgow Council meeting, 2008

Due for next review 2014