

## **ICM INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR MIDWIVES**

*'(A code of ethics) is not a dry dusty piece of paper; it is a living breathing embodiment of the spirit of midwifery and we are the ones that make it not only live, but sing and dance with the joy of life itself'*

Bronwin Pelvin  
New Zealand Midwife  
Journal of NZCOM, 1992

### **Preamble**

The aim of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) is to improve the standard of care provided to women, babies and families throughout the world through the development, education, and appropriate utilization of the professional midwife. In keeping with its aim of women's health and focus on the midwife, the ICM sets forth the following code to guide the education, practice and research of the midwife. This code acknowledges women as persons with human rights, seeks justice for all people and equity in access to health care, and is based on mutual relationships of respect, trust, and the dignity of all members of society.

### **Introduction**

In an effort to increase understanding and, hence, use of the International Code of Ethics for Midwives (1999), the ICM Board of Management commissioned the publication of this document. The document contains:

- the Code of Ethics,
- the glossary of terms used in the Code,
- the ethical analysis of the Code,
- a brief history of the development of the Code and
- suggestions on how the midwife can use this Code in practice, education or research.

## **THE CODE**

### **I. Midwifery Relationships**

- a. Midwives respect a woman's informed right of choice and promote the woman's acceptance of responsibility for the outcomes of her choices.
- b. Midwives work with women, supporting their right to participate actively in decisions about their care, and empowering women to speak for themselves on issues affecting the health of women and their families in their culture/society.
- c. Midwives, together with women, work with policy and funding agencies to define women's needs for health services and to ensure that resources are fairly allocated considering priorities and availability.
- d. Midwives support and sustain each other in their professional roles, and actively nurture their own and others' sense of self-worth.
- e. Midwives work with other health professionals, consulting and referring as necessary when the woman's need for care exceeds the competencies of the midwife.
- f. Midwives recognise the human interdependence within their field of practice and actively seek to resolve inherent conflicts.
- g. The midwife has responsibilities to her or himself as a person of moral worth, including duties of moral self-respect and the preservation of integrity.

- II. Practice of Midwifery
- a. Midwives provide care for women and childbearing families with respect for cultural diversity while also working to eliminate harmful practices within those same cultures.
  - b. Midwives encourage realistic expectations of childbirth by women within their own society, with the minimum expectation that no women should be harmed by conception or childbearing.
  - c. Midwives use their professional knowledge to ensure safe birthing practices in all environments and cultures.
  - d. Midwives respond to the psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of women seeking health care, whatever their circumstances.
  - e. Midwives act as effective role models in health promotion for women throughout their life cycle, for families and for other health professionals.
  - f. Midwives actively seek personal, intellectual and professional growth throughout their midwifery career, integrating this growth into their practice.
- III. The Professional Responsibilities of Midwives
- a. Midwives hold in confidence client information in order to protect the right to privacy, and use judgement in sharing this information.
  - b. Midwives are responsible for their decisions and actions, and are accountable for the related outcomes in their care of women.
  - c. Midwives may refuse to participate in activities for which they hold deep moral opposition; however, the emphasis on individual conscience should not deprive women of essential health services.
  - d. Midwives understand the adverse consequences that ethical and human rights violations have on the health of women and infants, and will work to eliminate these violations.
  - e. Midwives participate in the development and implementation of health policies that promote the health of all women and childbearing families.
- IV. Advancement of Midwifery Knowledge and Practice
- a. Midwives ensure that the advancement of midwifery knowledge is based on activities that protect the rights of women as persons.
  - b. Midwives develop and share midwifery knowledge through a variety of processes, such as peer review and research.
  - c. Midwives participate in the formal education of midwifery students and midwives.

Acknowledgements:

Dr. Joyce E.Thompson, CNM, DrPH

Dr. Henry O.Thompson, M.Div, PhD

Sister Anne Thompson, MTD, MS

Members of the International Confederation of Midwives Executive Committee 1990/1993 and the Delegates from member associations attending the International Council meeting in May 1993 and May 1999.

Adopted May 1993

Revised May 1999

Revised 2003.