



INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF MIDWIVES

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR BASIC MIDWIFERY PRACTICE 2002

INTRODUCTION

The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) is a federation of midwifery associations representing midwives in 72 nations of the world. The ICM works closely with all UN agencies in support of Safe Motherhood, primary health care strategies for the world's families, and the definition and preparation of the midwife. In keeping with the aims of the ICM, the ICM/WHO/FIGO international *Definition of the Midwife* (1992), the ICM *International Code of Ethics for Midwives* (1993), the ICM *Global Vision for Women and Their Health* (1996) and requests from member associations, the ICM has taken the lead in defining these essential competencies for midwives.

Throughout this document, the term "competencies" is used to refer to both the broad statement heading each section as well as the basic knowledge, skills and behaviours required of the midwife for safe practice in any setting. They answer the question: "What does a midwife do?" *and are evidence-based.* (See Appendix 1)

It is fully understood that these competencies may be considered maximum in some areas of the world, and minimum in other areas. Some knowledge and skills have been separated into a category, "additional". This allows for variation in the preparation and practice of midwives throughout the world, depending on the needs of their local community and/or nation.

Likewise, in recognition that midwives receive their knowledge and skills from several different educational pathways, these competencies are written for generic use by midwives and midwifery associations responsible for the education and practice of midwifery in their country or region. The essential competencies are guidelines for those interested in developing midwifery education, and information for those in government and other policy arenas who need to understand who a midwife is, what a midwife does, and how the midwife learned to be a midwife.

It is expected that the document will undergo continual evaluation as it is used world-wide and as the health care needs of childbearing women and families change.

KEY MIDWIFERY CONCEPTS

The key midwifery concepts that define the unique role of midwives in promoting the health of women and childbearing families include: partnership with women to promote self-care and the health of mothers, infants and families; respect for human dignity and for women as persons with full human rights; advocacy for women so that their voices are heard; cultural sensitivity, including working with women and health care providers to overcome those cultural practices that harm women and babies;

a focus on health promotion and disease prevention which views pregnancy as a normal life event. Midwives recognise that equity of status for women will bring the greatest impact on global maternal-child health by ensuring adequate nutrition, clean water and sanitation; so they are committed to the improvement of basic living conditions as well as providing competent midwifery services.

SCOPE OF MIDWIFERY PRACTICE

The scope of midwifery practice used throughout this document is built upon the ICM/WHO/FIGO international *Definition of the Midwife* (1992). Midwifery practice includes the autonomous care of the girl-child, the adolescent and the adult woman prior to, during and following pregnancy. This means that the midwife gives necessary supervision, care and advice for women during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period. The midwife conducts deliveries on her own responsibility and cares for the newborn infant. This care includes primary health care supervision within the community (preventive measures); health counselling and education for women, the family and the community including preparation for parenthood; the provision of family planning; the detection of abnormal conditions in the mother and child; the procurement of specialised assistance as necessary (consultation or referral); and the execution of primary and secondary emergency measures in the absence of medical help. Midwifery practice is ideally conducted within a community-based health care system that may include traditional birth attendants, traditional healers, other community-based health workers, doctors, nurses and specialists in referral centres.

THE MIDWIFERY MODEL OF CARE

The Midwifery Model of Care is based on the premise that pregnancy and birth are normal life events. The Midwifery Model of Care includes: monitoring the physical, psychological, spiritual and social well-being of the woman and family throughout the childbearing cycle; providing the woman with individualised education, counselling and antenatal care; continuous attendance during labour, birth and the immediate postpartum period; ongoing support during the postnatal period; minimising technological interventions; and identifying and referring women who require obstetric or other specialist attention. This model of care is woman-centred and therein lies its accountability.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION-MAKING IN MIDWIFERY CARE

Midwives assume responsibility and accountability for their practice, applying up-to-date knowledge and skills in caring for each woman and family. The safety and overall well-being of the woman is of foremost concern to the midwife. The midwife strives to support a woman's informed choices in the context of a safe experience. The midwife's decision-making process utilises a variety of sources of knowledge and is dynamic, responding to the changing health status of each woman. Midwives involve women and their families in all parts of the decision-making process and in developing a plan of care for a healthy pregnancy and birth experience.

- STEP 1: Collect information from the woman, from the woman's and the infant's records, and from any laboratory tests in a systematic way for a complete assessment.**
- STEP 2: Identify actual or potential problems based on the correct interpretation of the information gathered in Step 1.**
- STEP 3: Develop a comprehensive plan of care with the woman and her family based on the woman's or infant's needs and supported by the data collected.**
- STEP 4: Carry out and continually update the plan of care within an appropriate time frame.**
- STEP 5: Evaluate the effectiveness of care given with the woman and her family, consider alternatives if unsuccessful, returning to STEP 1 to collect more data and/or develop a new plan.**

GUIDING STATEMENT TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

The essential competencies for basic midwifery practice that follow are based on the values, vision, strategies and actions used by those who attend to the health needs of women and childbearing families. Member associations are encouraged to use this ICM statement of competencies, as needed in their countries, in the education, regulation and development of standards of practice for midwives as well as in policies needed to strengthen midwifery.

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR BASIC MIDWIFERY PRACTICE

MAY 2002

GENERIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Competency #1: Midwives have the requisite knowledge and skills from the social sciences, public health and ethics that form the basis of high quality, culturally relevant, appropriate care for women, newborn and childbearing families.

Basic Knowledge and Skills:

1. Respect for local culture (customs).
2. Traditional and modern routine health practices (beneficial and harmful).
3. Resources for alarm and transport (emergency care).
4. Direct and indirect causes of maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity in the local community.
5. Advocacy and empowerment strategies for women.
6. Understanding human rights and their effect on health.
7. Benefits and risks of available birth settings.
8. Strategies for advocating with women for a variety of safe birth settings.
9. Knowledge of the community - its state of health including water supply, housing, environmental hazards, food, common threats to health.
10. Indications and procedures for adult and newborn/infant cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
11. Ability to assemble, use and maintain equipment and supplies appropriate to setting of practice.

Additional Knowledge and Skills

12. Principles of epidemiology, sanitation, community diagnosis and vital statistics or records
13. National and local health infrastructures; how to access needed resources for midwifery care.
14. Principles of community-based primary care using health promotion and disease prevention strategies.
15. National immunisation programs (provision of same or knowledge of how to assist community members to access to immunisation services)

Professional Behaviours - The midwife:

1. Is responsible and accountable for clinical decisions.
2. Maintains knowledge and skills in order to remain current in practice.
3. Uses universal/standard precautions, infection control strategies and clean technique.
4. Uses appropriate consultation and referral during care.
5. Is non-judgmental and culturally respectful.
6. Works in partnership with women and supports them in making informed choices about their health.
7. Uses appropriate communication skills.
8. Works collaboratively with other health workers to improve the delivery of services to

women and families.

PRE-PREGNANCY CARE AND FAMILY PLANNING METHODS

Competency #2: Midwives provide high quality, culturally sensitive health education and services to all in the community in order to promote healthy family life, planned pregnancies and positive parenting.

Basic Knowledge of:

1. Growth and development related to sexuality, sexual development and sexual activity.
2. Female and male anatomy and physiology related to conception and reproduction.
3. Cultural norms and practices surrounding sexuality, sexual practices and childbearing.
4. Components of a health history, family history and relevant genetic history.
5. Physical examination content and investigative laboratory studies that evaluate potential for a healthy pregnancy.
6. Health education content targeted to reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS and child survival.
7. Natural methods for child spacing and other locally available and culturally acceptable methods of family planning.
8. Barrier, steroidal, mechanical, chemical and surgical methods of contraception and indications for use.
9. Counselling methods for women needing to make decisions about methods of family planning.
10. Signs and symptoms of urinary tract infection and common sexually transmitted infections in the area.

Additional Knowledge of:

11. Factors involved in decisions relating to unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.
12. Indicators of common acute and chronic disease conditions specific to a geographic area of the world, and referral process for further testing/ treatment.
13. Indicators of and methods of counselling/referral for dysfunctional interpersonal relationships including sexual problems, domestic violence, emotional abuse and physical neglect.

Basic Skills:

1. Take a comprehensive history.
2. Perform a physical examination focused on the presenting condition of the woman.
3. Order and/or perform and interpret common laboratory studies such as haematocrit, urinalysis or microscopy.
4. Use health education and basic counselling skills appropriately.
5. Provide locally available and culturally acceptable methods of family planning.
6. Record findings, including what was done and what needs follow-up.

Additional Skills:

7. Use the microscope.
8. Provide all available methods of barrier, steroidal, mechanical, and chemical methods of contraception.
9. Take or order cervical cytology smear (Pap test)

CARE AND COUNSELLING DURING PREGNANCY

Competency #3: Midwives provide high quality antenatal care to maximise the health during pregnancy and that includes early detection and treatment or referral of selected complications.

Basic Knowledge of:

1. Anatomy and physiology of the human body.
2. Menstrual cycle and process of conception.
3. Signs and symptoms of pregnancy.
4. How to confirm a pregnancy.
5. Diagnosis of an ectopic pregnancy and multiple fetuses.
6. Dating pregnancy by menstrual history, size of uterus and/or fundal growth patterns.
7. Components of a health history.
8. Components of a focused physical examination for antenatal visits.
9. Normal findings [results] of basic screening laboratory studies defined by need of area of the world; eg. iron levels, urine test for sugar, protein, acetone, bacteria.
10. Normal progression of pregnancy: body changes, common discomforts, expected fundal growth patterns.
11. Normal psychological changes in pregnancy and impact of pregnancy on the family.
12. Safe, locally available herbal/non-pharmacological preparations for the relief of common discomforts of pregnancy.
13. How to determine fetal well-being during pregnancy including fetal heart rate and activity patterns.
14. Nutritional requirements of the pregnant woman and fetus.
15. Basic fetal growth and development.
16. Education needs regarding normal body changes during pregnancy, relief of common discomforts, hygiene, sexuality, nutrition, work inside and outside the home.
17. Preparation for labour, birth and parenting.
18. Preparation of the home/family for the newborn.
19. Indicators of the onset of labour.
20. How to explain and support breastfeeding.
21. Techniques for increasing relaxation and pain relief measures available for labour.
22. Effects of prescribed medications, street drugs, traditional medicines and over-the-counter drugs on pregnancy and the fetus.
23. Effects of smoking, alcohol use and illicit drug use on the pregnant woman and fetus.
24. Signs and symptoms of conditions that are life-threatening to the pregnant woman; eg. pre-eclampsia, vaginal bleeding, premature labour, severe anaemia.

Additional Knowledge of:

25. Signs, symptoms and indications for referral of selected complications and conditions of pregnancy: eg. asthma, HIV infection, diabetes, cardiac conditions, post-dates pregnancy.
26. Effects of above named chronic and acute conditions on pregnancy and the fetus.

Basic Skills:

1. Take an initial and ongoing history each antenatal visit.
2. Perform a physical examination and explain findings to woman.
3. Take and assess maternal vital signs including temperature, blood pressure, pulse.
4. Assess maternal nutrition and its relationship to fetal growth.
5. Perform a complete abdominal assessment including measuring fundal height, position, lie and descent of fetus.
6. Assess fetal growth.
7. Listen to the fetal heart rate and palpate uterus for fetal activity pattern.
8. Perform a pelvic examination, including sizing the uterus and determining the adequacy of the bony structures.
9. Calculate the estimated date of delivery.
10. Educate women and families about danger signs and when/how to contact the midwife.
11. Teach and/or demonstrate measures to decrease common discomforts of pregnancy.
12. Provide guidance and basic preparation for labour, birth and parenting.
13. Identify variations from normal during the course of the pregnancy and institute appropriate interventions for:
 - a. low and/or inadequate maternal nutrition
 - b. inadequate fetal growth
 - c. elevated blood pressure, proteinuria, presence of significant oedema, severe headaches, visual changes, epigastric pain associated with elevated blood pressure
 - d. vaginal bleeding
 - e. multiple gestation, abnormal lie at term
 - f. intrauterine fetal death
 - g. rupture of membranes prior to term
14. Perform basic life saving skills competently.
15. Record findings including what was done and what needs follow-up.

Additional Skills:

16. Counsel women about health habits; eg. nutrition, exercise, safety, stopping smoking.
17. Perform clinical pelvimetry [evaluation of bony pelvis].
18. Monitor fetal heart rate with doppler.
19. Identify and refer variations from normal during the course of the pregnancy, such as:
 - a. small for dates [light]/large for dates [heavy] fetus
 - b. suspected polyhydramnios, diabetes, fetal anomaly (eg. oliguria)

- c. abnormal laboratory results
 - d. infections such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), vaginitis, urinary tract, upper respiratory
 - e. fetal assessment in the post-term pregnancy
20. Treat and/or collaboratively manage above variations from normal based upon local standards and available resources.
 21. Perform external version of breech presentation.

CARE DURING LABOUR AND BIRTH

Competency #4: Midwives provide high quality, culturally sensitive care during labour, conduct a clean and safe delivery, and handle selected emergency situations to maximise the health of women and their newborn.

Basic Knowledge of:

1. Physiology of labour.
2. Anatomy of fetal skull, critical diameters and landmarks.
3. Psychological and cultural aspects of labour and birth.
4. Indicators that labour is beginning.
5. Normal progression of labour and how to use the partograph or similar tool.
6. Measures to assess fetal well-being in labour.
7. Measures to assess maternal well-being in labour.
8. Process of fetal passage [descent] through the pelvis during labour and birth.
9. Comfort measures in labour: eg. family presence/assistance, positioning, hydration, emotional support, non-pharmacological methods of pain relief.
10. Transition of newborn to extra-uterine life.
11. Physical care of the newborn - breathing, warmth, feeding.
12. Promotion of skin-to-skin contact of the newborn with mother when appropriate.
13. Ways to support and promote uninterrupted [exclusive] breastfeeding.
14. Physiological management of the 3rd stage of labour.
15. Indications for emergency measures: eg. retained placenta, shoulder dystocia, atonic uterine bleeding, neonatal asphyxia.
16. Indications for operative delivery: eg. fetal distress, cephalo-pelvic disproportion.
17. Indicators of complications in labour: bleeding, labour arrest, malpresentation, eclampsia, maternal distress, fetal distress, infection, prolapsed cord.
18. Principles of active management of 3rd stage of labour.

Basic Skills:

1. Take a specific history and maternal vital signs in labour.
2. Perform a screening physical examination.
3. Do a complete abdominal assessment for fetal position and descent.
4. Time and assess the effectiveness of uterine contractions.
5. Perform a complete and accurate pelvic examination for dilation, descent, presenting part, position, status of membranes, and adequacy of pelvis for baby.
6. Follow progress of labour using the partograph or similar tool for recording.
7. Provide psychological support for woman and family.
8. Provide adequate hydration, nutrition and comfort measures during labour.

9. Provide for bladder care.
10. Promptly identify abnormal labour patterns with appropriate and timely intervention and/or referral.
11. Perform appropriate hand manoeuvres for a vertex delivery.
12. Manage a cord around the baby's neck at delivery.
13. Cut an episiotomy if needed.
14. Repair an episiotomy if needed.
15. Support physiological management of the 3rd stage of labour.
16. Conduct active management of the 3rd stage of labour including:
 - a. Administration of uterotonic agents
 - b. Controlled cord traction
 - c. Uterine massage after delivery of the placenta, as appropriate
17. Guard the uterus from inversion during 3rd stage of labour.
18. Inspect the placenta and membranes for completeness.
19. Estimate maternal blood loss.
20. Inspect the vagina and cervix for lacerations.
21. Repair vaginal/perineal lacerations and episiotomy.
22. Manage postpartum haemorrhage.
23. Provide a safe environment for mother and infant to promote attachment.
24. Initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible after birth and support exclusive breastfeeding.
25. Perform a screening physical examination of the newborn.
26. Record findings including what was done and what needs follow-up.

Additional Skills:

27. Perform appropriate hand manoeuvres for face and breech deliveries.
28. Inject local anaesthesia.
29. Apply vacuum extraction or forceps.
30. Manage malpresentation, shoulder dystocia, fetal distress initially.
31. Identify and manage a prolapsed cord.
32. Perform manual removal of placenta.
33. Identify and repair cervical lacerations.
34. Perform internal bimanual compression of the uterus to control bleeding.
35. Insert intravenous line, draw bloods, perform haematocrit and haemoglobin testing.
36. Prescribe and/or administer pharmacological methods of pain relief when needed.
37. Administer oxytocics appropriately for labour induction or augmentation and treatment of postpartum bleeding.
38. Transfer woman for additional/emergency care in a timely manner.

POSTNATAL CARE OF WOMEN

Competency #5: Midwives provide comprehensive, high quality, culturally sensitive postnatal care for women.

Basic Knowledge of:

1. Normal process of involution and healing following delivery [including after an abortion].

2. Process of lactation and common variations including engorgement, lack of milk supply, etc.
3. Maternal nutrition, rest, activity and physiological needs (eg. bladder).
4. Infant nutritional needs.
5. Parent-infant bonding and attachment; eg. how to promote positive relationships.
6. Indicators of sub-involution eg. persistent uterine bleeding, infection.
7. Indications of breastfeeding problems.
8. Signs and symptoms of life threatening conditions; eg. persistent vaginal bleeding, urinary retention, incontinence of faeces, postpartum pre-eclampsia.

Additional Knowledge of:

9. Indicators of selected complications in the postnatal period: eg. persistent anaemia, haematoma, embolism, mastitis, depression, thrombophlebitis.
10. Care and counselling needs during and after abortion.
11. Signs and symptoms of abortion complications.

Basic Skills:

1. Take a selective history, including details of pregnancy, labour and birth.
2. Perform a focused physical examination of the mother.
3. Assess for uterine involution and healing of lacerations/repairs.
4. Initiate and support uninterrupted [exclusive] breastfeeding.
5. Educate mother on care of self and infant after delivery including rest and nutrition.
6. Identify haematoma and refer for care as appropriate.
7. Identify maternal infection, treat or refer for treatment as appropriate.
8. Record findings including what was done and what needs follow-up.

Additional Skills:

9. Counsel woman/family on sexuality and family planning post delivery.
10. Counsel and support woman who is post-abortion.
11. Evacuate a haematoma.
12. Provide appropriate antibiotic treatment for infection.
13. Refer for selected complications.

NEWBORN CARE (up to 2 months of age)

Competency #6: Midwives provide high quality, comprehensive care for the essentially healthy infant from birth to two months of age.

Basic Knowledge of:

1. Newborn adaptation to extra-uterine life.
2. Basic needs of newborn: airway, warmth, nutrition, bonding.
3. Elements of assessment of the immediate condition of newborn; eg. APGAR scoring system for breathing, heart rate, reflexes, muscle tone and colour.
4. Basic newborn appearance and behaviours.

5. Normal newborn and infant growth and development.
6. Selected variations in the normal newborn; eg. caput, moulding, mongolian spots, haemangiomas, hypoglycaemia, hypothermia, dehydration, infection.
7. Elements of health promotion and prevention of disease in newborn and infants.
8. Immunisation needs, risks and benefits for the infant up to 2 months of age.

Additional Knowledge of:

9. Selected newborn complications, eg. jaundice, haematoma, adverse moulding of the fetal skull, cerebral irritation, non-accidental injuries, causes of sudden infant death.
10. Normal growth and development of the preterm infant up to 2 months of age.

Basic Skills:

1. Clear airway to maintain respirations.
2. Maintain warmth but avoid overheating.
3. Assess the immediate condition of the newborn; eg. APGAR scoring or other assessment method.
4. Perform a screening physical examination of the newborn for conditions incompatible with life.
5. Position the infant for breastfeeding.
6. Educate parents about danger signs and when to bring the infant for care.
7. Begin emergency measures for respiratory distress (newborn resuscitation), hypothermia, hypoglycaemia, cardiac arrest.
8. Transfer newborn to emergency care facility when available.
9. Record findings, including what was done and what needs follow-up.

Additional Skills:

10. Perform a gestational age assessment
11. Educate parents about normal growth and development, child care.
12. Assist parents to access community resources available to the family.
13. Support parents during grieving process for congenital birth defects, loss of pregnancy, or neonatal death.
14. Support parents during transport/transfer of newborn.
15. Support parents with multiple births.

Appendix 1. Background to the evidence-base of the competencies

Between 1995 and 1999 a modified Delphi Technique was carried out for seven rounds to establish the Provisional Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice. As agreed by the International Council (the Confederation's governing body) in 1999, the competencies were field-tested by 17 ICM member associations throughout 2001. The extensive field testing was undertaken by 1,271 practising midwives, 77 educator groups (total of 312 educators), and 79 senior level midwifery student groups (total of 333 individuals) from 22 countries; and 25 regulators from 20 countries. A total of 214 individual competency statements within six domains were presented for consideration

and comment. Almost all of the competencies were supported by a great majority of the persons/groups involved in the testing, with many receiving universal support. In April 2002 the ICM International Council discussed and adopted the Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice, therewith establishing it as an official ICM document.