

Certified Professional Midwife: **Recognizing a Valued Maternity Care Provider**

Executive Summary

Today, while hospital birth is now the norm for most parents, it is not the choice of every family, and there is growing recognition that there should be a range of options for primary maternity care, including the option of midwife-led births at home and in freestanding birth centers.

The Case for Supporting Midwives as Part of Primary Maternity Care

There have been many studies in the U.S. and in other countries that have shown midwife-led, out-of-hospital births to be safe and beneficial. While there are acknowledged differences in midwifery education, when comparing women who received midwife-led models of care with women who did not, researchers have found no statistically significant differences between the groups for overall fetal loss/neonatal death. In addition, researchers have found that women who had midwife-led care were less likely to experience costly interventions such as Caesarean sections (Hatem et al., 2008; Fullerton, Navarro, & Young, 2007; Johnson & Daviss, 2005). The health care system could also benefit from midwives as a solution to projected shortages of obstetricians and to expand access to the kind of prenatal care that could help to reduce the disparities in pregnancy and birth outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Credentialing Competence: Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs)

The CPM credential uses a competency-based approach to certification, administered by the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM). In order to be certified, all CPM applicants must participate in a minimum number of specified clinical experiences; demonstrate competency in a specified set of knowledge, skills and abilities; and pass the NARM written examination. This process ensures that all CPMs have the required experience, knowledge, and demonstrated competence to provide the Midwives Model of Care (Midwifery Task Force, 2008).

What is Primary Maternity Care?

Primary Maternity Care refers to the provision of integrated, accessible, maternity care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of maternity care needs, developing a sustained partnership with childbearing women, and practicing in the context of family and community.

Primary Maternity Care services must include the following elements:

- Education
- Health promotion
- Preventive clinical services
- Social support
- Continuity of care
- Accessibility
- Cultural appropriateness
- Location in, and orientation toward, communities

(Boston Women's Health Book Collective, National Black Women's Health Project, National Women's Health Network, Women's Institute for Childbearing Policy, 1994.)



This focus on competencies is an approach that has been successfully used not just for professional certification programs, but also throughout higher education for more than four decades. Competency-based approaches are now being embraced by many within higher education, and in health care education, because of a heightened recognition that it is learning that matters, not the amount of time spent in learning activities.

Challenges to the CPM Profession

One significant challenge facing the CPM profession is the need for state licensure of CPMs. Currently CPMs cannot practice legally in 24 states. Licensure allows for greater quality assurance by establishing clear practice guidelines as well as mechanisms for oversight and review of CPM practice. Licensure protects the public from those who would attempt to provide midwifery services inappropriately. A second challenge is the need for greater diversity within the profession to help address racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes and the costs associated with them.

Policy Recommendations

In order to validate and support CPMs as a critically needed part of our primary maternity care system, and to establish greater accountability for births at home and in birth centers, state legislators and other policy makers need to:

- Establish licensure based on the CPM credential
- Provide oversight of CPMs through a board of midwifery or advisory council/board within existing oversight boards, comprised mostly of licensed midwives and having the authority to set guidelines for CPM practice
- Establish reporting requirements

There are additional strategies to support and encourage the CPM profession and midwife-led models of care through activities that:

- Guarantee CPMs as eligible health care providers under Medicaid and other reimbursement programs
- Provide funding to establish new midwifery educational programs
- Including CPMs in a national registry for maternity care data to allow for research on pregnancy and birth outcomes for planned out-of-hospital births compared with similarly low-risk planned hospital births
- Support research to better understand the role of CPMs

Conclusion

Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) offer a safe and family-centered option for primary maternity care. To ensure that women who choose to birth outside of the hospital have access to skilled and accountable practitioners, it is critical for states to offer a pathway to licensure for CPMs. This licensure should be based on the CPM credential while also establishing the structures that properly regulate the activities of CPMs as primary maternity care providers. With support from state officials and other leaders, we will expand access to primary maternity care for all women, and we will establish the credentialed midwife and the midwife-led model of care as safe and beneficial options for maternity care in the U.S.