



# POSITION STATEMENT

## Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Programs

It is the position of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) that

- Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) are competent and ready to practice midwifery upon successful graduation and certification by the American Midwifery Certification Board, Inc. (AMCB). Additional fellowship or residency programs should not be required for entry to midwifery practice.
- Some CNMs and CMs may desire to attain knowledge and skills beyond the basic level of midwifery practice as defined by ACNM Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice<sup>1</sup> and/or they may wish to function in a highly specialized environment.
- One mechanism to attain specific skills beyond the core competencies is outlined in ACNM's Standards for the Practice of Midwifery<sup>2</sup> Standard VIII. An additional mechanism is through a structured program entitled a "Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Program", which aims to provide post certification advanced training beyond the ACNM core competencies.
- In order to assure the integrity of Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Programs for the learner and the institution, the ACNM recommends certain core domains be included in any fellowship program. Domains should include content on health disparities, health equity, anti-racism and discrimination.
- If an accreditation process for Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Programs is developed, it should be midwifery-led and not rely on other accrediting bodies that do not include midwifery leadership.

### Definition of a Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Program:

A Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Program is advanced education and training in a focused area of specialty midwifery practice. The term 'postgraduate fellowship' is a better descriptor than residency because medicine uses 'residency' to describe required specialty training, and nursing uses 'residency' as a term to describe a transition-to-practice program for the newly graduated nurse. A fellowship for healthcare professionals allows a provider to focus on a particular patient population or develop further expertise in a specialized area.

Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Programs consist of paid, structured learning opportunities and mentored clinical experiences over at least a 6-12 month period designed to prepare midwives to function independently in a specialty setting or to learn procedures or skill sets not covered in basic education. It is not a prolonged orientation for the purpose of graduates who need more experience or increased confidence. Midwifery fellowships should be designed to build upon the ACNM core competencies in areas of specialty clinical practice or settings and are not restricted to newly graduated midwives.

## **Background**

While midwifery internships for graduate nurse-midwives existed in urban practice settings in the 1970s, the first known midwifery fellowship was developed at Holy Family Birth Center in Texas (personal communication, Angela Murdaugh, April 2020). Other birth centers followed suit and represent the majority of midwifery fellowships. In 2010, the Institute of Medicine *Future of Nursing* Report recommended increasing postgraduate training programs as a means to promote retention and address workforce shortages for nurses and advance practice nurses. In the subsequent decade, midwifery residencies and fellowships developed in other midwifery practice settings such as federally qualified health centers and academic medical centers.

There has been little published regarding midwifery fellowship or residency programs. In 2015, McCarthy highlighted the benefits and challenges of a birth center fellowship program<sup>6</sup>. Benefits included providing a supportive entry into practice and as a solution to meet the increase in demand for birth center services. Challenges included the steep learning curve of new graduates and fatigue on the part of the mentors. In 2018, Niles and Hunt<sup>7</sup> identified 8 current midwifery fellowship programs in the United States using internet search data. These programs tended to be located in the western United States and predominantly focused on recently graduated CNM/CMs. Four programs were operated by university hospital units and four by birth centers, with the clinical experience obtained in a combination of birth center, home, and/or hospital settings. Program lengths varied but were most frequently reported to be approximately 12 months.

The 2012 ACNM student report included a request that ACNM explore options and modalities for postgraduate residency or internship programs. A taskforce was formed and submitted a report at the March 2015 ACNM board meeting, in which adequate funding and availability of faculty were identified as the key challenges facing residency programs<sup>3</sup>. The taskforce report also stated that “residency for advanced practice nurses is not the norm nor have the studies to date shown that it improves clinical competency”.<sup>3</sup> The recommendation made in this report was that ACME address the issue of adequate preparation for entry-level CNMs/CMs within the context of the existing educational programs rather than suggesting an additional

level of training beyond graduation. The task force also highlighted the following concerns: residency programs may interfere with existing clinical spots for student midwives; a lack of preceptors and faculty available; no sustainable government or private funding; and the lack of a standard definition for residencies.

In 2017, Dau published an article requesting ACNM define and accredit postgraduate midwifery programs.<sup>4</sup> She cited various reasons including the need for standardized definitions, affirmation that postgraduate programs were not required for practice, protections for learners as inexpensive labor, and that postgraduate programs have a formal structure and be accredited by ACME. In response, ACME recognized that the term ‘fellowships’ best fits the programs and established a taskforce to assess the current climate related to fellowship programs and to assess the need for developing accreditation criteria for midwifery fellowships.<sup>5</sup> The product of this task force was the 2018 Niles and Hunt<sup>7</sup> article describing the existing midwifery fellowship programs in the United States

### **Accreditation of Midwifery Fellowship Programs**

Accrediting agencies establish programmatic requirements for the purpose of ensuring the quality of education. The Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME) is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a national accrediting agency for basic CNM and CM educational programs. Currently, there is no accreditation mechanism specifically designed for postgraduate midwifery fellowships. Midwifery fellowship programs should be midwifery-led to ensure an understanding of the competencies, standards, and other professional practice responsibilities expected for midwifery practice-are maintained.

There are both opportunities and challenges to seeking formal accreditation of postgraduate midwifery fellowship programs. Accreditation would provide consistency in the purpose and structure of programs and assurance that participants would receive sufficient education, resources, and support for their professional development and to meet program objectives. Challenges of accreditation may include: 1) the cost associated with applying for, and maintaining accreditation, particularly for fellowships in small practices, and 2) the necessity of additional accreditation for midwifery fellowships when an agency is seeking accreditation for multiple APRN fellowship programs.

### **Principles for Postgraduate Fellowship Programs**

In order to assure the integrity of the fellowship program for the learner and for the institution, ACNM recommends the following core domains for any fellowship program:

Domain I: Mission and Goals

- The mission for the program is clearly articulated
- Goals and specific outcomes are identified

Domain II: Institutional Commitment and Resources

- Documentation of institutional commitment

- Adequate resources to allow for learning activities

#### Domain III: Mentorship

- Each fellow should be provided at least one dedicated mentor
- Fellow and mentor(s) should meet regularly to assure that goals are being met

#### Domain IV: Curriculum

- Extends beyond ACNM core competencies
- Develops curriculum based on the goals of the program
- Integrates content on health disparities, health equity, and anti-racism
- Supports scholarly evaluation of evidence-based practice

#### Domain V: Program Assessment and Evaluation of Outcomes

- Demonstrates program effectiveness through the use of evaluation data
- Analyzes outcomes to design program improvements
- Engages fellows in continuous program evaluation and improvement

### REFERENCES

1. American College of Nurse-Midwives. Core competencies for basic midwifery practice. <http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000050/ Core%20Comptencies%20Dec%202012.pdf>. Published December 2012. Accessed May 28, 2015.
2. American College of Nurse-Midwives. Standards for the practice of midwifery. <http://www.midwife.org/ACNM/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000051/ Standards for Practice of Midwifery Sept 2011.pdf>. Revised September 24, 2011. Accessed May 28, 2015.
3. ACNM Residency Task Force. Report to the ACNM Board of Directors April 2, 2015.
4. Dau, K. Midwifery Fellowships: Addressing the Trend. A Call to ACNM to Define and Accredite Post-Graduate Midwifery Programs. *Quickening*. 2017;48(3):15.
5. Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME). ACNM responds to a Call for Action on Midwifery Fellowships. *Quickening*. 2017;48(4):16.
6. McCarthy, A. Benefits and Challenges of a Nurse-Midwifery Fellowship: A review of the Ruth B. Stifel Fellowship Program at the Midwife Center for Birth and Women's Health. *JMWH*. 2015;60:263-266.
7. Niles, P.M., Hunt, R. Internet Search for Midwifery Fellowship Programs. *JMWH*. 2018;63:678-681.

- The term fellow as it is used in this document is defined as a person who is doing a fellowship as opposed to a person who is a Fellow in the American College of Nurse-Midwives (FACNM)

Note. Midwifery as used throughout this document refers to the education and practice of certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) who have been certified by the American

College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) or the American Midwifery Certification Board, Inc. (AMCB).

Source: Taskforce for Postgraduate Fellowship Programs