AMERICAN COLLEGE of NURSE-MIDWIVES

POSITION STATEMENT

Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Programs

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) affirms that:

- Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) are competent and ready for independent midwifery practice upon graduation from an accredited program and certification by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB).
- Postgraduate midwifery fellowships are optional, advanced educational opportunities that expand knowledge and skills beyond ACNM Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice[1], and in alignment with ACNM Standards for the Practice of Midwifery[2] and ACNM guidelines for Expansion of Midwifery Practice and Skills Beyond Basic Core Competencies.[3]
- Fellowship programs can prepare midwives for work in specialized settings or with specific populations, with potential benefits for workforce diversification, distribution, and longevity.
- Program integrity and equity are essential; programs should include content on health disparities, health equity, anti-racism, and discrimination.
- To ensure professional fidelity, programs and any future accreditation process must be midwifery-led.

Definition

A Postgraduate Midwifery Fellowship Program is structured, advanced education and mentored clinical experience in a focused area of midwifery practice. Unlike a "residency" to practice in a medical specialty or in a nursing transition-to-practice program, fellowships are not prolonged orientations or prerequisites for basic competency. They are designed to expand on ACNM Core Competencies to build knowledge and skills for unique care settings or to work with specific patient populations. They may serve new graduates and midwives returning to practice, using didactic learning, mentored practice, and scholarly activities to develop advanced expertise.

Background and History

Midwifery internships emerged in urban settings in the 1970s. Holy Family Birth Center in Texas developed the first known midwifery fellowship (personal communication, Angela Murdaugh, April 2020). Through the 1990s and early 2000s, most fellowships were birth-center based. In 2010, the Institute of Medicine *Future of Nursing Report* called for increased postgraduate opportunities to address workforce shortages and improve retention, prompting program development in other midwifery practice settings such as federally qualified health centers and academic medical centers.[4]

Citing concerns about confidence and mastery of competencies among new graduates, the 2012 student report included a request for postgraduate options.[5] In 2015 the ACNM taskforce charged with exploring options highlighted funding and faculty availability as major barriers and recommended that entry-level competency remain the responsibility of accredited midwifery education programs, with enforcement through the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME).[6,7] In 2018, another taskforce report was generated in response to a call for formal definitions, quality assurance through accreditation, fellow[†] protection, and clarity that fellowships should not become mandatory for basic practice.[8,9] A related article described the 8 known fellowships in the United States which focused on providing opportunities for recently graduated midwives. These programs lasted approximately 12 months in length, and offered opportunities in birth center, home, and/or hospital settings.[10]

In 2024, Olsen and Farley identified and described 17 programs distributed somewhat evenly across five U.S. regions.[11] The programs were mainly in birth centers, but also in hospitals, ambulatory settings, homes, and mobile units.[11] Led by program directors and "champions" or mentors, the programs were funded through grants and/or organization funding.[11] The programs employed a variety of teaching/learning modalities to offer experiences working with people needing high-risk, skill-specific, and/or population-specific care.[11] Most lasted 6–12 months, included content on social determinants of health, and emphasized diversity in the midwifery workforce.[11] Fellow salaries, supported by grants or institutional funding, averaged $50,000–$74,999—lower than typical midwifery salaries but comparable to first-year physician residents.[11]

A separate published report of one midwifery fellowship described specific fellow responsibilities: weekly outpatient and inpatient clinical shifts (sometimes with a reduced schedule or without an independent schedule); monthly specialty clinics or continuing education courses; faculty and ACNM affiliate meeting attendance; faculty committee participation; completion of a quality improvement project; and precepting midwifery and medical students at the end of the program.[12] In this program, fellow salaries were set at two-thirds of a full salary.[12]

Benefits, Concerns, and Challenges

There are several recognized and/or potential benefits of postgraduate fellowships for new midwives, midwives returning to practice, employers, patients, and the workforce.[11,12]

- Supportive transition through structured mentorship for new graduates, reducing stress and burnout.
- Enhanced clinical expertise in high-risk or specialized care settings.
- Leadership and scholarship development, including quality improvement and teaching experience.
- Opportunities for recruitment and improved workforce retention and distribution to underserved or rural areas.
- Improved patient care quality and satisfaction through expansion of access to care and evidence-based practices.

Concerns and challenges associated with postgraduate midwifery fellowships include:

- Existing faculty and preceptor shortages could be exacerbated due to additional demand on clinical sites.[6]
- Lower fellow salaries, the absence of Graduate Medical Education (GME) funding, and the cost of hosting a fellowship program could deter applicants or programs, or create inequity related to participation.[11,12]
- A misperception that fellowships are mandatory could delay entry to practice.[6,9]
- There is no current mechanism to enforce program standards, which complicates program evaluation and leaves potential for misuse of fellow effort.[8] If an accreditation process is established, it must be midwifery-led to protect midwifery philosophy and standards.[9] Adding an accreditation requirement adds significantly to program administration expenses.[12-14, §]

Recommendations to Facilitate Program Development and Sustainability

ACNM recommends that all midwifery fellowships adhere to five core domains to ensure program integrity:

Domain I: Mission and Goals
- Clearly articulate the fellowship's mission.
- Define goals and measurable outcomes.

Domain II: Institutional Commitment and Resources
- Demonstrate administrative support and adequate resources.

Domain III: Mentorship
- Assign each fellow at least one dedicated mentor.
- Require regular mentor–fellow meetings to review progress.

Domain IV: Curriculum
- Extends beyond ACNM Core Competencies.
- Addresses health disparities, health equity, and anti-racism.
- Supports scholarly evaluation of evidence-based practice.

Domain V: Program Assessment and Evaluation of Outcomes
- Use data-driven evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness.
- Engage fellows in continuous quality improvement.

Conclusion

Postgraduate midwifery fellowships are voluntary, advanced training programs that enhance specialized expertise, strengthen the midwifery workforce, and promote equitable, high-quality care. ACNM maintains that graduation and certification alone qualify midwives for independent practice. Fellowships should remain optional pathways, guided by midwifery-led standards,

sustained through adequate funding, and designed to advance diversity, equity, and excellence in midwifery practice. In the future, established program standards and evaluation strategies can help ensure the operationalization of those values.

References

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† 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).

§ In contrast to the fewer than 20 midwifery postgraduate fellowship programs in the United States, a 2024 survey of nurse practitioner (NP) and physician assistant (PA) postgraduate fellowships identified over 300 programs[13]. There are multiple accrediting agencies with varying requirements and standards, and most NP and PA programs remain unaccredited.[13,14] Accreditor fees may vary, but for reference, the initial cost of accreditation through Consortium for Advanced Practice Providers (CAPP) is $11,000, renewal is $5,500, and annual charges are $2,500.[15]

Notes: 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 Midwifery Certification Board, Inc. (AMCB).

Source: Taskforce for Postgraduate Fellowship Programs, Clinical Standards and Documents
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