

First Assist in Surgery

Serving as first assistant at cesarean section is a frequently performed expanded midwifery practice skill. Midwives have found that expanding their practice to include the ability to serve as first assistant may promote continuity of care and improve access to emergency services.

While first assist at surgery is not a core competency, it is a skill that CNMs®/CMs® may acquire beyond basic midwifery education. Such skills are termed “expanded midwifery practice” and are addressed in general in the *QuickInfo* with that title, which is available on the ACNM Web site at:

http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/education/Expanded_Practice_03_30_10_001.pdf. As with any expanded practice skill, the choice to act as first assistant reflects the midwife’s employment and clinical interests. In addition, it is governed by the hospital credentialing process. Thus, individual midwives might seek privileges to assist at cesarean sections and tubal ligations or general gynecological surgery.

The Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice

This document, found at http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/descriptive/Core_Competencies_6_07.pdf, delineates the fundamental knowledge, skills, and behaviors expected of a new practitioner. The focus, as highlighted in the title, is *basic* midwifery practice. *Expanded midwifery practice* consists of those procedures, such as first assisting, that may be acquired beyond basic midwifery education.

Standards for the Practice of Midwifery

Realizing that practice would evolve and that individual and institutional differences would influence decisions regarding expanding practice beyond the Core Competencies, ACNM developed *Guidelines for the Incorporation of New Procedures into Nurse-Midwifery Practice* in the early 1970s. This document has been incorporated as Standard VIII in the 2009 revision of the ACNM *Standards for the Practice of Midwifery*

(http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/descriptive/Standards_for_Practice_of_Midwifery_12_09_001.pdf). If you are a midwife, following this standard is essential when you choose to expand your practice beyond the core competencies. **Standard VIII** is as follows:

MIDWIFERY PRACTICE MAY BE EXPANDED BEYOND THE ACNM CORE COMPETENCIES TO INCORPORATE NEW PROCEDURES THAT IMPROVE CARE FOR WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

The midwife:

1. Identifies the need for a new procedure taking into consideration consumer demand, standards for safe practice, and availability of other qualified personnel.
2. Ensures that there are no institutional, state, or federal statutes, regulations, or bylaws that would constrain the midwife from incorporation of the procedure into practice.
3. Demonstrates knowledge and competency, including:
 - a) Knowledge of risks, benefits, and client selection criteria.
 - b) Process for acquisition of required skills.
 - c) Identification and management of complications.
 - d) Process to evaluate outcomes and maintain competency.
4. Identifies a mechanism for obtaining medical consultation, collaboration, and referral related to this procedure.
5. Maintains documentation of the process used to achieve the necessary knowledge, skills and ongoing competency of the expanded or new procedures.

Legal Considerations

The Standards direct the midwife to consider relevant statutes and regulations that might constrain the midwife from incorporation of a particular procedure. State laws and regulations are addressed in two ACNM publications available from the ACNM Resource Catalog*: *Nurse-Midwifery Today: A Handbook of State Laws and Regulations* (2002), and *Direct Entry Midwifery: A Summary of State Laws and Regulations* (2002). Some state laws explicitly reference the ACNM Standards thereby permitting advanced practice procedures consistent with the guidelines.

Midwives who wish to consider expanding their practice to include first assist at surgery may want to be aware of the following resources:

ACNM Position Statement

The Certified Nurse-Midwife/Certified Midwife as First Assistant at Surgery

[http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/position/CNM_ & CM as First Assist_05.pdf](http://www.midwife.org/siteFiles/position/CNM_&_CM_as_First_Assist_05.pdf). ACNM takes the position that, because the ACNM guidelines are competency based, ACNM opposes the requirement of a specific credential external to the midwifery profession. ACNM believes that a number of different training and credentialing mechanisms are appropriate for midwives who choose to serve in the first assistant role for obstetrical or gynecological procedures.

ACNM Handbook

Midwives considering expanding their practice to include first assist should obtain the ACNM handbook on this topic from our Clinical Issues Series, *Midwife as First Assistant*. This handbook is designed to be of practical help to midwives expanding their practice in the area of surgical first assisting. The handbook is available for purchase from the ACNM Resource Catalog and the ACNM Online Store at <http://acnm.stores.yahoo.net/midasfirasha.html>.

ACNM Educational Opportunities

First assist workshops are often held at the ACNM Annual Meeting. Information on our upcoming Annual Meeting is always available on the ACNM Web site at www.midwife.org. In addition, you may also check our Continuing Education calendar at http://www.midwife.org/ceu_calendar.cfm for upcoming first assist courses.

CRNFA Certification

Certification as a CRNFA is not necessary for midwives to serve in the first assist role. Additional information about this credential is available at: http://www.cc-institute.org/cert_crnf_abou.aspx. In addition, a list of RNFA training programs by state is available at: www.cc-institute.org/cert_crnf_prep_rnfa.aspx. Some of these programs have targeted first assist programs such as ob/gyn. Included in this category is the National Institute of First Assisting, Inc. (NIFA) which, in collaboration with the Community College of Southern Nevada, offers first assist training including periodic 2-day seminars and distance learning: 1-800-922-7747, Web site: <http://rnfa.org/>.

The ACNM "QuickInfo" series was developed by the Department of Professional Practice & Health Policy to respond to common inquiries by summarizing ACNM resources regarding a particular topic, as well as listing selected literature and a variety of other resources. Your feedback is welcomed; contact our department at (240) 485-1844 or pphp@acnm.org. (Listing of other services and products does not imply endorsement by ACNM.)

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