

Women's Health Outlook

Provided by UNMC's Department of OB/GYN, the Wellness Council of the Midlands, and the Olson Center for Women's Health

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Certified Nurse-Midwives An Alternative in Women's Health Care

In years past, women in the U.S. would associate a midwife with delivering babies in the home. Presently, this is far from reality. Many people, especially in our society, are unaware that "nurse-midwives" are an alternative for women with their health care. Nurse-midwives offer much more to women than just delivering babies. In Nebraska, there are currently eight midwife practices and nineteen nurse-midwives who are employed, with many other nurse-midwives seeking positions.

Who Are Nurse-Midwives?

Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) are registered nurses who have completed accredited nurse-midwifery education programs, passed a national certification examination, and met other criteria for certification by the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) Certification Council. The Council is now referred to as the American Midwifery Certification Board. Nurse-midwives are educated in both nursing and midwifery. August 2005 data collected by ACNM showed 6,200 Certified Nurse-Midwives in clinical practice. The percentage of CNM-attended births has continued to increase since 1975. The vast majority of CNM-attended births occur in hospitals. In 2002, national statistics indicated that 97% of CNM-attended births occurred in hospitals, 1.8% in free standing birth centers, and 1.2% in the home. In the state of Nebraska, nurse-midwives do not attend deliveries in the home setting.

What do CNMs Offer for Women?

Certified Nurse-Midwives' scope of practice includes caring for women throughout the lifespan from menarche (onset of menstrual cycles) through menopause. A nurse-midwife specializes in:

Normal, low risk pregnancy

Prenatal care

Labor and delivery

Postpartum care

Well-woman exams

Primary care

Gynecology

Family planning

Preconception counseling

Contraceptive counseling

CNMs practice within a health care system that provides for consultation, collaboration, and referral with physicians when indicated by the woman's health status.

Twelve basic concepts and skills from the social sciences and public health permeate all aspects of nurse-midwifery practice:

1. Promoting family-centered care
2. Facilitating healthy family and interpersonal relationships
3. Communicating, guiding, and counseling constructively
4. Communicating and collaborating with other members of the health care team
5. Providing health education
6. Promoting continuity of care
7. Using community resources
8. Promoting health and preventing disease
9. Recognizing pregnancy as a normal physiologic process
10. Advocating informed choices and decision making
11. Considering bioethical issues related to women's health
12. Knowing and respecting cultural variations¹

Where Can I Find a CNM?

Established in 1991, the UNMC Nurse-Midwife Clinical Program was the first nurse-midwifery practice in the state of Nebraska. There are currently five full-time CNMs available at four different UNMC locations throughout Omaha. CNMs serve a diverse population including Latina, Sudanese, Asian, African American, Native American, and Caucasian women. Consistent with the philosophy of midwifery, CNMs encourage preconception counseling, early prenatal care, education regarding pregnancy and birth, and non-intervention when possible to decrease complications during labor and delivery. One of the CNM's well-accepted philosophies includes attending to the woman during active labor, providing emotional and sometimes physical support, to assist the labor progress. Anticipating the mother's needs and allowing the mother to be an active participant in the labor process contributes to a positive outcome.

In 2005, the UNMC Nurse-Midwives were the primary providers for 390 women. There were 89% vaginal deliveries, 7% primary cesarean sections, and 4% elective repeat cesareans. There was a 79% VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean) success rate with women who had experienced a prior cesarean section.

When Should I See a Specialist?

There are certain health factors which exclude midwifery care during pregnancy. These include disease processes such as insulin-dependent diabetes or gestational diabetes requiring insulin, chronic hypertension, repeat cesarean sections, and

severe preeclampsia (development of severe hypertension in a pregnancy that utilizes additional medications to lower blood pressure (like hydralazine) with a decrease in platelet count). A diligent review of a woman's health history assists the CNM in providing appropriate collaboration and referral when indicated. The professional relationship our service maintains with general obstetrician/gynecologists, maternal-fetal medicine, gynecologic oncology, and urogynecology specialists, allows us to offer women continuity in their health care as the need arises.

*Contributed by Bridget M. Wieczorek, CNM, MSN
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UNMC's Certified Nurse Mid-Wives
back row: Bridget Wieczorek, Lydia Rhodes, Anita Jaynes
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