

# *The Perfect Combination of Art and Science*

## *Florida's Licensed Midwives*

An Information Booklet



Division of Medical Quality Assurance  
Council of Licensed Midwifery  
4052 Bald Cypress Way - BIN # CO6  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3256

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## **THE PERFECT COMBINATION OF ART & SCIENCE FLORIDA'S LICENSED MIDWIVES**

The Florida Licensed Midwifery Law (F. S. S. 467), Rules (F. A. C. 64B24), and educational programs are patterned after the European model of maternity and midwifery care. This model places midwives as the primary care providers for normal, healthy pregnant women. In most instances, this does not require that a midwife gain the professional designation of "nurse" prior to obtaining the designation and profession of midwife.

Unfortunately, in the United States where we spend far more money per capita on maternity and newborn care than any other industrialized nation, we fall well behind other countries in perinatal morbidity and mortality. However in countries where midwives function as the primary care providers for normal pregnancy and birth, the perinatal morbidity and mortality rates are far lower than those we experience in the United States.

The State of Florida has recognized the need to utilize maternity care funds more efficiently and to increase the limited availability of maternity care providers. It intends that the licensing, regulation, and practice of midwifery may help to reduce this shortage, thus increasing the quality of perinatal services available to pregnant women throughout the state.

In 1991 the Florida Legislature Senate Health Care Standards Committee affirmed that home is a safe birth site for healthy women when screening is performed and emergency plans are formulated. The Florida Legislature supports the family's right to have birth take place in the setting of their choice.

### **The World Health Organization in conjunction with the International Confederation of Midwives designates a Midwife as:**

"A midwife is a person who is qualified to practice [the discipline of] midwifery. A midwife is trained to give the necessary care and advice to women during pregnancy, labor and the postnatal period, conduct normal deliveries on her own responsibility, and to care for the newly born infant as well as having training in gynecology and child care. At all times a midwife must be able to recognize the warning signs of abnormal or potentially abnormal conditions that necessitate referral to a doctor, and to carry out emergency measures in the absence of medical help. A midwife may practice in hospitals, health units or domiciliary services. In any of these situations, a midwife has an important task in health education within the family and community."

### **Florida's Goals for Utilizing Licensed Midwives**

The late Governor Lawton Chiles focused a great deal of attention during his administration upon improving the health of mothers and their babies in our state. With this attention came the restructuring of the Law and Rules governing direct-entry midwifery practice; the Florida "Midwifery Practice Act", chapter 467 F. S. and the Florida Administrative Code 64B24. With the adoption of the revised Law and Rules, Florida brought the profession of direct-entry midwifery into line with accepted midwifery practices throughout the world, providing some of the most educated and qualified midwives in the nation. At present, many states are dealing with issues surrounding midwifery practice and maternity care services and are considering what is being accomplished in the state of Florida as a model for direct-entry midwifery for the entire nation.

Florida's maternity care goals, as identified by the Legislature and adopted by The Healthy Start Coalition (1992), intend midwives to be the care providers for 50% of all normal, healthy, pregnant women by the year 2000.

Unfortunately, this is a goal of which we have fallen short.

With the advent of managed care systems and commitment to establishing avenues decreasing health care spending without sacrificing quality care, the education and institution of midwives has become a very cost effective way to manage health care dollars, while maintaining quality maternity care for healthy women. The licensing and regulation

of Midwives in Florida provides women and their families with choices that have not been available in current maternity managed care systems.

### **What is a Florida “Direct-Entry” Midwife?**

Florida Licensed Midwives are direct-entry midwives. A direct-entry midwife receives specialized training and education in the academics and skills specific to midwifery practice. Previous education or licensure in another health care field or profession is not required for admission into a direct-entry midwifery education program. Midwifery education, licensure, regulation, and practice are independent of any other profession.

Throughout Europe and the rest of the world as well as in Florida and many other states, midwifery is a profession that is separate yet complimentary to nursing, obstetrics, and all other health care professions. Although many direct-entry midwives may hold degrees and certifications in other disciplines, this is not mandatory.

Midwifery educational programs within Florida public educational institutions must abide by the Florida curricular framework as adopted by the Department of Education. Nonpublic educational institutions that conduct approved midwifery programs must be accredited by a member (or successor) of the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation and be licensed by the State Board of Nonpublic Career Education. All Midwifery programs within the state are strongly encouraged to attain accreditation through the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council (MEAC), which is the only accrediting body recognized by the U. S. Department of Education for accrediting direct-entry midwifery programs. Florida midwifery programs are by statute required to encompass the core competencies of the Midwives Alliance of North America and the American College of Nurse-Midwives (1994), the nations leading authorities in midwifery and nurse-midwifery education respectively.

All skills necessary to practice midwifery are included into Florida educational programs and consist of, but are not limited to, nursing, pharmacology, alternative medicine, obstetrics, gynecology, fetology, embryology, genetics, lab and diagnostics and many other disciplines. Clinical internships are mandatory and integrated into the direct-entry midwifery educational programs and involve home birth, birth center, and hospital clinical experiences.

### **What is a Licensed Midwife?**

A Licensed Midwife is licensed by her/his state or province as a community-based practitioner who provides independent, comprehensive, holistic, individualized midwifery care through prenatal care and birthing services to low risk patients.

Constituting 95% of Florida's home birth practitioners, historically, Licensed Midwives have been home birth and birth center practitioners. However today's Licensed Midwives can be integrated effectively and efficiently into any health clinic or hospital setting. They serve as maternal health care team members for patients with at-risk pregnancies; complimenting services provided by obstetricians and other maternal health care practitioners.

### **Regulation of Florida Licensed Midwives**

Florida Licensed Midwives are not “lay” midwives. (A “lay” midwife is usually trained by apprenticeship and has no formal midwifery education or training.) The definition of lay midwife has generally, and incorrectly so, been used to describe any midwife who was not a certified nurse midwife. The practice of “lay” midwifery is a violation of state law as a third degree felony and is punishable as such.

Midwives have been licensed and regulated to practice midwifery in the state of Florida since 1931 but have been serving women for centuries before licensing or regulation was a reality. The Laws and Rules governing midwives have changed considerably over the past years, grand fathering or “grand mothering” as the case may be, currently Licensed Midwives into each new regulatory system.

The regulatory board for Licensed Midwives is the Council of Licensed Midwifery, Division of Medical Quality Assurance, Department of Health. In July 1997, the regulation of Licensed Midwives, along with 37 other professional

Boards and Councils, including doctors, nurses, dentists and other health care providers, moved to the Department of Health.

## **Practice Guidelines for Licensed Midwives**

Licensed Midwives are considered Licensed Independent Practitioners and are not required to practice under the auspices of any other health care professional. Practice guidelines for Licensed Midwives as provided in Florida State Law and Florida Administrative Code, define the scope and limits of midwifery practice and apply uniformly to all Licensed Midwives throughout the state. The guidelines provide a risk scoring assessment tool and system for entry into midwifery care in which a patient's medical, psychological, obstetrical, gynecological and surgical history are evaluated.

Once a patient is assessed by a Licensed Midwife as appropriate to receive midwifery services, rules specify the minimum of care to be provided during antepartum, intrapartum and postpartum periods. This is inclusive of criteria for on-going risk assessment, consultation, referral and/or transfer of care to a physician with hospital obstetrical privileges. Licensed Midwives are prepared to recognize deviations from normal throughout pregnancy, consult appropriately and when necessary, provide emergency management while facilitating transport to higher level obstetrical services. Students are trained by their individual educational programs in the emergency management of maternal and newborn complications.

## **The Specialization of Midwifery Care**

Midwifery care and education in Florida is targeted at maintaining "normal" and differentiating normal problems from abnormal complications. Midwives have been described as the caretakers or "experts" of normal pregnancy and birth. Florida Licensed Midwives recognize the unique individuality of each patient served and strive to provide care that is specifically tailored to meet these needs. Patient care features a continuity of care in which the same midwife and/or midwifery team provides care throughout pregnancy, labor, delivery and the postpartum. Licensed Midwives spend quality time with each patient, individualizing care plans that are tailored to be sensitive to the patient's cultural, ethnic, family, and lifestyle needs, while supporting a normal, healthy pregnancy, delivery and postpartum.

Midwives spend a great deal of time educating and instructing their patients in positive self-care. This promotes a healthier pregnancy, healthier newborn and places much of the responsibility for a healthy pregnancy on the expectant mother and her family in regards to their behaviors and habits both personally and collectively. Care includes but is not limited to, nutritional counseling, psychosocial evaluation and support, informed consent, anticipatory guidance and patient advocacy. Patient education is provided in total pregnancy needs, nutrition, childbirth, sibling preparation, breastfeeding, infant care, parenting skills and family planning. Each individual patient's educational needs are assessed and addressed accordingly.

## **Midwifery's Integration Into The Current Maternity Care System**

### **Home Birth Practitioner:**

Florida Licensed Midwives are not required by Law or Rule to practice under the supervision or "auspices" of a physician, yet many Licensed Midwives seek to develop a collaborative relationship with an obstetrician in their community to further promote continuity of care goals. Home birth services are provided to healthy women who experience a normal, healthy pregnancy, labor and birth.

Each patient signs an Informed Consent Form outlining, among other things, the midwife's experience, aspects of midwifery care, the status of the midwife's professional liability insurance and the patient's responsibilities in the continuance of her care. An plan for emergency care must be prepared for every home-birthing patient that identifies obstetrical and pediatric back-up plans in the case of emergency transport.

### **Birth Center Practitioner:**

Florida Licensed Midwives who own or are employed by birth centers are working in collaboration with physicians specified as “consultants” under established birth center laws and protocols. Physician consultants are not required to be “on-site” nor are Licensed Midwives required to work under their direct supervision. Each facility, midwife and physician establishes protocols for patient care within the structure of Law and Rule for each birth center arrangement. Midwifery is an autonomous profession, separate from but complimentary to other maternity care professions.

### **Health Clinic and Hospital Practitioner:**

Although Licensed Midwives have not traditionally practiced in health clinics and hospitals, the concept is becoming increasingly attractive to both facilities and midwives. Licensed Midwives practice in health clinic and hospital settings under protocol agreements much like they do in birth centers. A health clinic or hospital wishing to engage a Florida Licensed Midwife, or to begin a midwifery service, should feel confident that they are employing well-educated, quality practitioners of maternity care services. Innovative health clinics and hospitals choosing to use Licensed Midwives are providing specialized services and birth choices to their patients that are an invaluable asset to the entire community.

Licensed Midwives are educated in emergency care procedures, to administer prescriptive drugs and to provide collaborative care under physician supervision for at-risk patients in any birth setting. In at-risk cases, a collaborative care management plan signed by the patient, midwife and physician will identify specific guidelines for management strategies and treatment, as well as criteria for discontinuing the collaborative management agreement. This arrangement is especially useful for normally healthy mothers and their babies who are experiencing temporary at-risk problems that resolve during the course of the pregnancy.

### **Maternity care professionals who provide emergency care to Licensed Midwifery patients are addressed in the Midwifery Practice Act, FS 467.017 (2) as follows:**

“Any physician licensed under chapter 458 or 459, or any certified nurse-midwife, or any hospital licensed under chapter 395, or any osteopathic hospital, providing medical care or treatment to a woman or infant due to an emergency arising during delivery or birth as a consequence of the care received by a midwife licensed under chapter 467, shall not be held liable for any civil damages as a result of such medical care or treatment unless such damages result from providing, or failing to provide, medical care or treatment under circumstances demonstrating a reckless disregard for the consequences so as to affect the life or health of another.”

### **Reimbursement for the Services of a Licensed Midwife**

Florida State law requires that the services provided by both Licensed Midwives and Certified-Nurse Midwives be reimbursed by private insurers and Medicaid. In May 1997 the Florida State Legislature approved legislation allowing for Medicaid reimbursement for home birth services of Licensed Midwives.

Many expectant families who have medical coverage seek out the specialized services of a midwife and pay for expenses not covered by private insurance from their own resources. Families who are not covered by private insurance view midwifery services as a quality, cost-effective alternative to traditional physician-attended hospital birth.

### **Liability Issues and Professional Liability Insurance**

Actuarial data show that Licensed Midwives are the least likely of any maternity health care practitioners to face litigation by a patient. There are several reasons for this; licensed midwifery patients sign an Informed Consent document which informs them of the scope of practice and limitations, as well as the status of professional liability insurance of the midwife before they enter into care. All the components of caregiver-patient relations that have been known to reduce the risk of liability are intrinsic to midwifery services; patient education and responsibility, empowerment, shared decision-making and informed choice.

The relationship developed over the course of pregnancy between an expectant family and their midwife becomes a very personal one. Midwifery patients receive quality care and nurturing that is extremely important during pregnancy. This “low-tech, high-touch” approach to maternity care is second nature to midwives and leaves their patients with a feeling of warmth and total wellness unmatched by many other health care professions.

Licensed Midwives have access to professional liability insurance through the F.M.M.J.U.A. On May 4, 1998, enacted in conjunction with home birth Medicaid reimbursement legislation, rules were adopted that require all Licensed Midwives in the state of Florida to carry professional liability insurance in the minimum amounts of \$ 100,000/\$ 300,000 by license renewal December 31, 1999.

## **Becoming a Florida Licensed Midwife**

The requirements for becoming a Florida Licensed Midwife include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Be at least 21 years of age
- Complete a 3 year, 90 credit hour direct entry midwifery education program that is approved by the Department of Health, Council of Licensed Midwifery. The program’s curriculum must include the Core Competencies established by the Midwives Alliance of North America and the American College of Nurse - Midwives (1994)
- Pass the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) National Certification Examination
- Provide proof of current Professional Liability Insurance coverage
- Submit appropriate fees
- Maintain Adult and Infant CPR Certification
- All other requirements as established by F. S. 467 and F. A. C. 64B24

Continued licensure requires completion of 21 Continuing Education credits; 1 hour each of HIV/AIDS update, domestic violence, prevention of medical errors and current Laws and Rules pertaining to midwifery regulation and practice. Midwives must also submit a practice report annually to the Council of Licensed Midwifery for quality review and statistics gathering.

## **Academic Requirements of Florida Direct-Entry Midwifery Education Programs**

**The 3 year academic curriculum must include coursework in, but is not limited to:**

- Basic Sciences (anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, etc.)
- Behavioral Sciences (psychology, human growth and development, etc.)
- College Level Math and English
- Health Care Skills and Counseling
- Childbirth Education
- Lab and Diagnostic Testing
- Pharmacology and Alternative Therapies
- Genetics, Embryology and Fetology
- Normal Antepartum, Intrapartum, and Postpartum
- Complications of the Antepartum, Intrapartum, and Postpartum
- Neonatal Assessment, Newborn Care and Breastfeeding
- Neonatal Resuscitation Program Certification
- Adult and Infant Basic CPR Certification
- Well Women Gynecology and Family Planning
- Professional Issues and Ethics
- Obstetrical Practice Management

## **Clinical Education**

Clinical preceptors must be Florida Licensed Midwives, Certified Nurse Midwives or Obstetricians and possess at least three years of professional experience. They must maintain active supervision and are placed with a limited number (2:1) of students. Clinical education places students in hospitals, birth centers, homes, private offices, health care clinics, county public health units and public high schools.

Clinical education encompasses all aspects of maternity care during the antepartum, intrapartum, and postpartum periods, and emphasizes differentiation of normal from abnormal events and issues. Ultimately, clinical experiences are structured to correlate with classroom academics and every effort is made toward attaining this goal.

Requirements include:

- 25 Birth Observations
- Management of 50 Women During Antepartum, Labor and Delivery, Immediate Postpartum, and Extended Postpartum Follow-up
- Management of 50 newborns
- Teaching Childbirth and Breastfeeding Education Classes
- Well Woman Gynecology and Family Planning
- Political Involvement

**For specific questions or more information about Florida Licensed Midwives, contact:**

The Department of Health - Council of Licensed Midwifery  
4052 Bald Cypress Way - BIN # CO6  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3256

Written by:

Yvonda L. Hedrick, LM, CPM, CCE and Justine Clegg, MS, LMHC, LM, CPM  
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