

MIDWIFERY REGULATORY COUNCIL OF NOVA SCOTIA

POLICY ON REQUESTS FOR CARE OUTSIDE MIDWIFERY STANDARDS

Promotion of and respect for the client's informed choice is a fundamental principle of midwifery practice. In accordance with the Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia (MRCNS) Standards of Midwifery Practice, midwives are required to:

- support the client as the primary decision-maker in her care;
- respect the client's value system and cultural needs and beliefs;
- provide relevant information to the client in an unbiased manner;
- encourage clients to actively participate in decisions about their care and the manner in which services are provided;
- act as an advocate for the client and her newborn.

At times, clients may request care that is outside of the standards or scope of midwifery practice and/or conflicts with the midwife's clinical judgment regarding safe care.

This policy is intended to assist midwives in addressing situations where the issues are unresolvable and a safe, acceptable solution to a client request cannot be found within midwifery standards.

Should a client request care outside standards, the midwife will:

1. Engage the client in a relevant, comprehensive and non-judgmental informed choice¹ discussion as related to their request for care outside standards, with the understanding that this discussion may need to take place over a series of encounters. The conversation should include limitations within midwifery scope and skill set regarding safety of the requested care.
2. Initiate discussion, consultation or transfer of care if indicated, as per MRCNS' Indications for Discussion, Consultation and Transfer of Care. This includes making the client aware of the document and offering a consult with another midwife/provider.
3. Share and discuss the advice from consultations with other midwives/providers with the client.

¹ Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia. (2018). Informed Choice Policy.

4. Allow for multiple discussions on the topic and for the client to share concerns and ask questions.

5. Ensure contemporaneous documentation in the medical record.

Upon completion of the steps above, should the client continue to request care outside midwifery standards, the midwife must choose from one of the options below:

Option 1: Continue to provide care within the scope of midwifery, while continuing to recommend the standard of care in a relevant, non-coercive fashion as the clinical situation evolves. Midwives who choose this option should communicate regularly with other providers in the client's circle of care and draw upon hospital resources for complex care planning, if available. In the case that a client has requested care outside standards for a home birth, the midwife and client must discuss and plan care during the labour which may include discussing limitations to care in an out of hospital setting, initiating emergency health services and discussing transfer to the hospital during the labour. The midwife should also inform the client that they are obligated to initiate consult or transfer of care during labour according to MRCNS Indications for Discussion, Consultation and Transfer of Care.

OR

Option 2: Inform the client that their midwifery care must be terminated, and make reasonable efforts to assist the client in finding another care provider. Steps for termination of care, including sending a registered letter confirming termination of care by a specific date and maintaining this letter in the client's permanent health record, must be completed prior to the onset of labour, so the client is no longer in midwifery care when labour commences. If these steps have not been taken, the midwife must continue to provide care to the client as per Option 1.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

If client requests care outside of standards during an urgent or emergency situation, the midwife must continue to provide the best care possible to the client as required under the Code of Ethics². "A midwife may not abandon care of a client in the course of labour" as per Standard Eight of the MRCNS Standards of Midwifery Practice. If the client declines a transfer to hospital from a home birth when transport is indicated, the

² Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia. (2019). Code of Ethics.

midwife must notify the hospital, request consultation if required, and if appropriate call additional midwives and/or an ambulance.

References

BCCNM (2021). Policy on requests for care outside standards. Retrieved from: https://www.bccnm.ca/Documents/standards_practice/rm/RM_Policy_on_Requests_for_Care_Outside_Standards.pdf

College of Midwives of Ontario (2013). When a Client Chooses Care Outside Midwifery Standards of Practice. Retrieved from <http://www.cmo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/20.When-aClient-Chooses-Care-Outside-Midwifery-Standards-of-Practice.pdf>

Kotaska, A. (2017). Informed consent and refusal in obstetrics: A practical ethical guide. *Birth*;44:195- 199. <https://doi.org/10.1111/birth.1228>

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