

## ARE YOU THINKING OF USING A NURSE MIDWIFE? By Pamela Platis, CNM

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Are you one of the many people interested in finding out whether a nurse-midwife is right for you? Well, you're not alone. In New York State, there are over 1000 licensed practicing midwives. The number of women choosing CNM's over traditional OB/GYN's has doubled in the past decade. In 2002, New York midwives attended 11% of total births. In addition to excellent, safe, satisfying maternity care, you can also rely on CNM's for your gynecological care including annual exams, hormone therapy, and family planning. The CNM's focus is on the woman and her needs. They educate, explain options, and follow up as often as necessary to maintain a woman's health.

The philosophy of nurse-midwifery care "is focused on the needs of the individual and family for physical care, emotional and social support and active involvement of significant others according to cultural values and personal preferences."

Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) focus on you -- the woman, the mother, the child, the father, the partner, the grandparent, the sibling, the relative, the friend - - while providing health care to women and newborns.

Making sound decisions is key to good health care, and nurse-midwives want you to take an active role in making the right decisions for you and your family. To assist you in the decision making process, we have developed this section of the ACNM Web site. The goal is to provide you with a variety of information about such topics as midwifery care, women's health and maternity care, and family-centered care.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF MIDWIFERY

"...And when she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her "Fear not, for now you will have another son.'" Genesis 35:17. Known as shifcha, sage-femme, weise-frau, or Hebamme..."wise woman", or "with woman", the midwife has been part of life for as long as we know.

In this country, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, midwifery, like medicine, was practiced informally. Midwives were vital to their communities, acting as nurses, herbalists, and even veterinarians. Later, when obstetrics became viewed as a profitable business, the medical establishment made attempts to abolish midwifery and home birth. Women flocked to physicians to receive the "best care". Birth became a medical procedure in a

hospital often including anesthesia, episiotomy, and assisted forceps delivery. Birth intervention became common. During the 1960's, in the United States, perinatal mortality rates continued to rise while those of other industrialized nations stabilized, then dropped. American women, seeking the safe, satisfying birth experience still common in Europe, began to re-explore midwives and even home birth. There was a growing interest in childbirth education, breastfeeding, and natural childbirth.

Midwifery programs expanded. Although home birth had been the norm early on, nurse-midwives gradually moved into the hospital setting. The Frontier Nursing Service in Kentucky and the Maternity Center Association in New York City afforded midwives an opportunity to establish themselves in several medical institutions. Midwifery programs thrived because data showed and shows to this day, that women experience superior outcomes with midwifery care, even those with an increased risk of poorer obstetric outcomes.

Today, a midwife is a person who has: been regularly admitted to a midwifery education program, has completed the prescribed course of study, and is registered and/or legally licensed to practice. The Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) is educated in both nursing and midwifery, and is certified according to the requirements of the American College of Nurse Midwives. While midwifery is the independent management of women's health care, the CNM works in agreement with physicians who provide collaboration, consultation, and referrals, as indicated by the client's health status.

For more information or to schedule an appointment with a Certified Nurse Midwife at Community Care Physicians, please call 783-3110.