

STANDARD ON CONTINUITY OF CARE

BACKGROUND

The provision of continuity of care is a goal that has inherent value for both clients and midwives and is a means to support excellent outcomes, meaningful relationships, informed choice, choice of birth place, and normal birth.

Evidence is emerging that supports improved outcomes for clients who receive continuity of care. A 2013 Cochrane review concluded that clients who receive continuity of care are less likely to request an epidural; less likely to have an episiotomy, instrumental delivery, preterm delivery; and less likely to experience a fetal loss or neonatal death. The review found no significant difference in rates of caesarian section or intact perineum. Moreover, community demand for continuity of care is strong in Manitoba. The experience of Manitoba midwives also supports the value of continuity of caregiver.

Definition

Continuity of midwifery care is achieved when a relationship develops over time between a client and a small team¹ of midwives.

STANDARD

A client of midwifery care should meet all the members of their team. In order to meet the standard on continuity of care, midwifery services must be made available to the client by the same team of midwives from the onset of care, during all trimesters, and throughout labour, birth and the first six weeks post-partum.

Primary care responsibility may be shared by an on-call group of no more than 5 midwives in a number of different ways, as long as a system is in place to ensure the coordination of each client's and newborn's care. This system must be documented as a practice protocol and must include:

- a way for current information on each client to be communicated to the on-call midwife;
- regular review of each client's chart to ensure that an appropriate schedule of visits is maintained and clinical concerns are followed up in a timely manner; and
- a process for evaluating the system's effectiveness.

It is important that the client is aware of how continuity of care will be provided. Whenever possible, the midwifery team will support flexible arrangements between client and midwife.

Responsibilities of the Midwifery Team

- A midwife or midwifery team must inform the client how they work as a team.
- A midwife or midwifery team must inform a client of:
 - The procedure for contacting their midwifery team.
 - On call arrangements of the midwives involved in the client's care

¹ Groups anticipating long-term team arrangements of more than 5 midwives should seek guidance from the CMM and submit an Alternate Practice Arrangement.

College of Midwives of Manitoba

- The practice's policies on the number of hours an individual midwife may be in continuous attendance at a birth.
- The midwife may be asked to provide documentation to the College of Midwives of Manitoba on how they are facilitating continuity of care for their clients.
- Students and supervised midwives do not add to the number of midwives involved in a client's care in regards to this standard. In such cases, it is important to be mindful of how additional caregivers may impact the client's care.

Note: Midwives may create a variety of different systems to ensure effective coordination of care is achieved. Examples include:

- Assigning a midwife to a coordinating role for each client and identifying this coordinating midwife to the client and on the chart. In this system, the midwife fulfilling this role may change from time to time so long as the client is informed and the change is charted;
- Scheduling a regular weekly team meeting where the charts of all clients in care are reviewed;
- Having the on-call midwife review all charts for issues needing follow-up when they take over call.