Professional Code of Ethics and Conduct for Midwives

Every mother deserves a Midwife
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Foreword

There are numerous reasons why Ethiopian midwives are and should be concerned with professional code of ethics, but all of those reasons can be condensed into one general statement: professional ethics in midwifery is important for clients, midwives, and the profession.

This midwifery code of ethics is aimed to improve the standards of care provided to women, infants and the community at large through the guiding sets of principles by which the midwife is morally and ethically obliged to provide for the most interest of his/her clients. This ethical code and conduct manual for Ethiopian midwives play a critical role in the promotion of public confidence. The general public and other health care professionals will have more favourable opinion on midwifery when they understand that Ethiopian midwives take ethics seriously, have invested energy in the development of professional ethical code, and work towards maintaining ethical conduct.

Thus, this process clearly informs clients, lawmakers, regulatory bodies, other health care professionals, and the general public that Ethiopian midwives have the capacity to regulate themselves. With this code of ethics, I urge all stakeholders to act accordingly and adhere to the principles set forth in this code of ethics and further advance the progression to the highest level through ethical standards and practices.

It is our hope that Ethiopian midwifery practitioners, educators, students, researchers, and managers will benefit from and make wise use of this manual in their professional career. I would like to add that, it is an important document that can contribute a lot in relation with providing quality of care to mothers and their newborns.
Acknowledgements

The Ethiopian Midwives Association (EMA) gratefully acknowledges the expertise, time and contributions of all those who engaged in the development of this Code of Ethics, enriching the code with their collective wisdom, intellectual input and the shared experience of their diverse organizations.

EMA also extends sincere appreciation to the individuals and organizations that participated in the first and final draft consultative workshops held on 30th June and 4th August 2011. It is a product of joint efforts involving professionals, experts, consultants, facilitators, and cooperating partners, including Federal Ministry of Health, Ethiopian Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration Control Authority (EFMHCACA) and Federal Ethics and Anticorruption Commission.

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In conclusion, EMA acknowledges and appreciates the commitment, support and contribution of all those individuals and institutions that thoroughly reviewed the ethical code and provided constructive feedback for completion and realization of the final document.
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“A code of ethics is not a dry dusty piece of paper; it is a living breathing embodiment of the spirit of midwifery and we are the ones that make it not only live, but sing and dance with the joy of life itself.”

Bronwin Pelvin

Background

This professional Code of Ethics has been developed for the midwifery profession in Ethiopia. It is intended to be relevant to all midwives in all areas of maternity services including those encompassing the midwifery direct practice, management, education, and research domains. It is assumed that midwives have a responsibility to refine and promote this Code in midwifery and maternity services, participating in policy at all levels of governance, and developing their knowledge and understanding of ethics and midwifery in order to respond effectively to issues arising from their practice.

In considering this Ethical Code, it should be borne in mind that it has been designed for multiple audiences: midwives; midwifery students; women receiving midwifery care and their families; the community; employers of midwives; midwifery regulatory authorities; and consumer protection agencies. It is also noteworthy that the concepts of ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ are substantially the same and have been used interchangeably throughout this code.

This Code has particularly been designed to address one of the major activities which is developing code of ethics as stipulated in EMA’s strategic plan document. In addition, it reflects on the midwifery profession’s commitment to respect, promote, protect, and uphold the rights of women and their infants in both the receipt and provision of midwifery

This Code has also been made complementary to the ICM Code of Ethics (2010) and is intended to be interpreted in conjunction with it, as well as other ethical standards and guidelines developed by health professionals’ regulatory authority (FMoH) including the Ethiopian Occupational Standards.
Introduction

This Code of Ethics describes moral obligations that guide the behaviours of midwives and individuals representing the profession of midwifery, including those in education, management, and research. The moral obligations reflect universal ethical principles that are traditionally associated with the health-care professions but have been written to emphasize midwifery values and standards in the various roles of professional midwifery practice.

Each midwife shall act, at all times, in such a manner as to justify public trust and confidence, to uphold and enhance the good standing and reputation of the profession, to serve the interest of the society, and above all to safeguard the interests of individual clients.

The midwife’s primary professional responsibility is towards each woman and her infant(s) requiring or receiving midwifery care, in particular the individual woman-midwife partnership, while recognizing and respecting the role of partners, family and friends in the woman’s life. Midwives assist women in pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting, and support them to maintain, restore or improve their health and that of their infants. The midwifery profession also acknowledges the diversity of people constituting Ethiopian society, and the responsibility of midwives to provide just, compassionate, culturally competent and responsive midwifery care to each childbearing woman and her infant(s), including other clients who may seek sexual and reproductive health services including family planning.

The midwifery profession recognizes the universal human rights of people, and in particular of each woman and her infant(s); and the moral responsibility to safeguard the inherent dignity and equal worth of everyone. This include recognizing, respecting, actively promoting and safeguarding the right of each woman and her infant(s) to the highest attainable standard of midwifery care as a fundamental human right, and that ‘violations or lack of attention to human rights can have serious health consequences’.

In summary, through behaviours consonant with the moral obligations contained in the professional Code of Ethics, midwives support and
maintain the integrity of the profession of midwifery and thus contribute to a profession worthy of being considered by society as a public good. This Code of Ethics is therefore designed to have several important uses by midwives within the profession. The code serves as a guide for midwives in their professional practice in whatever role they assume, provides a framework for peer consultation and review and orients midwifery students to the moral obligations of the profession into which they are being socialized. The code also informs others about the ethical principles that guide professional midwifery practice.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Professional Code of Ethics for Midwives in Ethiopia is to:

- Provide the fundamental ethical standards and values to which the midwifery profession is committed, and that are incorporated in other professional midwifery codes and standards for women-centred midwifery practice.

- Provide Ethiopian midwives with a reference point from which to reflect on the conduct of themselves and others.

- Indicate to each woman receiving midwifery care and her family, including colleagues from other professions, and the Ethiopian community about the reproductive rights, standards and ethical values they can expect midwives to uphold.

- Guide ethical decision making and quality of care in midwifery practice.

**PHILOSOPHY OF MIDWIFERY CARE**

- Midwifery care is based on respect for pregnancy as a state of health and childbirth as a normal physiologic process and a profound event in a woman’s life.

- Midwifery care respects the diversity of women’s needs and the variety of personal and cultural meanings which women, families and communities bring to the pregnancy, birth, and early parenting experience.
• The maintenance and promotion of health throughout the childbearing life cycle of the woman are central to midwifery care. Midwives focus on preventive care and the appropriate use of technology.

• Midwifery care is continuous, personalized, and non-authoritarian. It responds to a woman’s and other clients’ social, emotional, and cultural as well as physical needs.

• Midwives respect the woman’s and other clients right to choice of caregiver and place of birth in accordance with the Standards of Practice. Midwives are willing to attend birth in a variety of settings, including birth at home.

• Midwives encourage the woman to actively participate in her care throughout pregnancy, birth and postpartum period and make choices about the manner in which her care is provided.

• Midwifery care includes education and counselling, enabling a woman to make informed choices.

• Midwives promote decision-making as a shared responsibility, between the woman, her family, and her caregivers. The mother is recognized as the primary decision maker.

• Midwives regard the interests of the woman and the foetus as compatible. They focus their care on the mother to obtain the best outcomes for the woman and her newborn.

• Fundamental to midwifery care is the understanding that a woman’s caregivers respect and support her so that she may give birth safely, with power and dignity.
INTERNATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE MIDWIFE:

As accepted by the ICM membership and Joint Study Group on Maternity Care, the ICM/WHO/FIGO (1992) and ICM (February, 2011) Revised First Paragraph:

“A midwife is a person who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme that is duly recognized in the country where it is located and that is based on the ICM *Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice* and the framework of the ICM *Global Standards for Midwifery Education*; who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title ‘midwife’; and who demonstrates competency in the practice of midwifery.

The midwife is recognised as a responsible and accountable professional who works in partnership with each woman to give the necessary support, care and advice during pregnancy, labour, and the postpartum period, to conduct births on the midwife’s own responsibility and to provide care for the newborn and the infant. This care includes preventive measures, the promotion of normal birth, the detection of complications in mother and child, the accessing medical care or other appropriate assistance and the carrying out of emergency measures.

The midwife has an important task in health counselling and education, not only for the woman, but also within the family and the community. This task should involve antenatal education and preparation for parenthood and extend to woman’s health, sexual or reproductive health and child care.

A midwife may practice in any setting including the home, community, hospitals, clinics or health units.

*Adopted by the ICM Council meeting, Agenda Item 10.1: 21 February 2011;*
Preamble

The Professional Code of Ethics for Midwives in Ethiopia identifies core values for the midwifery profession and establishes the standards of conduct that are reasonably expected of all midwives in practice.

One of the hallmarks of a profession is the commitment by its members to high standards of ethical practice. Ethiopian Midwives Code of Ethics is a set of standards that members of a midwifery profession use to guide their practice. Registrants of Midwifery should at all times maintain standards of conduct worthy of midwifery professionals. By doing so, they will enhance their personal stature as professionals and help maintain the credibility and prestige of the midwifery profession. They will also secure the continuing acknowledgment of their professional merits by the community as a whole.

The Code serves as a guide to assist the ethical decisions faced by practicing midwives and provides a framework for the self regulation of midwifery practice in Ethiopia. It also acts as the basis for continuing education, self-evaluation and peer review.

The Code comprises core value statements that have been elaborated into ethical practice points for reference and action. The Code is divided into three sections:

- Midwives and their clients
- Midwives and their practice
- Midwives and their profession

The midwife’s primary responsibility is to the clients they care for. Midwives should provide care according to their clients’ individual needs, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, age, social or economic status. Midwives shall respect their clients’ values and autonomy. They should advocate on their clients’ behalf when necessary.

Midwives are responsible for providing the highest standards of midwifery care and ethical practice possible within any given situation. They should be familiar with the profession’s ethical stance on such issues as practice accountability, preservation of confidentiality, skills competency and the maintenance of client privacy and dignity.
All midwives are responsible for maintaining and enhancing the reputation of the profession. Midwives should act at all times in accordance with ethical healthcare practices, actively promote professional ethics, and foster public trust and confidence in the midwifery profession.

This Code requires every midwife to uphold the values outlined and elaborated in this document. It calls upon them to practice self-regulation, exercise professional accountability and respect the ethics of midwifery practice. This document also provides examples of professional misconduct which may be subject to disciplinary action by the regulatory authorities.

The Code supplements the requirements of the Federal Ministry of Health professional’s code of conduct and regulations. It will be reviewed every 3 years by the Ethiopian Midwifery Association/Board.
A. MIDWIVES & THEIR CLIENTS

Value Statement 1: Respect client’s individual values and needs

Midwives shall provide care which respect individuals’ needs, values and dignity, and does not discriminate on the basis of the clients’ language, culture, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, social or economic status.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives shall

1.1. Assist clients to express their individual needs and values and take these into consideration when determining the optimal plan of care.

1.2. Actively involve their clients in the planning and delivery of care.

1.3. Provide care regardless of clients’ gender, ethnicity, religion, age, health, and socio-economic status.

Value Statement 2: Respect and promote clients’ autonomy

Midwives shall respect the clients’ right for self-determination and provide them with whatever information they require to make informed decisions concerning their own care.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives shall

2.1. Accept the right of each woman to control her pregnancy and birthing experience.

2.2. Accept that the woman is responsible for decisions that affect herself, her baby, and her family.

2.3. Uphold each woman’s right to free, informed choice and consent throughout her childbirth experience.

2.4. Clearly inform and educate clients and the public as to the role,
function, standards and philosophy of midwifery practice.

2.5. Assist clients in obtaining the necessary information from appropriate sources, when what is required is beyond the midwife’s scope.

2.6. Respect the informed decision of a client having the necessary ability to accept or refuse care.

2.7. Obtain consent for midwifery interventions where necessary and collaborate with other members of the health care team to obtain consent for medical treatment. When clients are incapable of making informed choices, consent should be sought from family members or significant others.

2.8. Provide appropriate care until alternative arrangements are made, if the midwife is unable to comply with the client’s requests because they run contrary to the law of midwife’s moral beliefs.

Value Statement 3: Respect clients’ right to confidentiality

Midwives shall refrain from disclosing confidential information obtained in the course of professional practice without the consent of the client or a person entitled to act on her behalf, except where disclosure is required by law or by the order of the court.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

3.1. Safeguard the confidentiality of all client-related information in order to protect the woman’s right to privacy.

3.2. Disclose confidential information only as authorized by the client, or when there is a legal obligation to disclose the information.

3.3. Maintain the anonymity of clients when disclosing confidential information in circumstances other than that stated in 3.2.
Value Statement 4:  
Respect and preserve clients’ privacy and dignity

Midwives shall protect the privacy and dignity of their clients, ensuring that client self-respect and self-esteem do not suffer as a consequence of any commission or omission of midwifery care.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

4.1. Provide midwifery care in a manner that preserves the clients’ privacy and dignity.

4.2. Prevent or resolve any situation in which clients are not accorded privacy or dignity.

4.3. Render appropriate care to support a dignified and peaceful death in case where life can no longer be sustained.
B. MIDWIVES & THEIR PRACTICE

Value Statement 5:
Safeguard the Well-Being of Women and their Newborns

A midwife’s primary responsibility is to safeguard the well-being of the Women and Newborns in her/his care. Midwives use their knowledge and expertise to provide a high standard of care to women and their families.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

5.1. Practise midwifery in accordance with the health professions code of conduct, the health regulation, the bylaws and policies of the FMoH.

5.2. Promote the normal process of birth within the context of safe practice.

5.3. Accept full responsibility for the care they provide to women, their newborn infants, families and communities.

Value Statement 6:
Provide care in a responsible and accountable manner

Every midwife shall be responsible for ensuring that the client receives safe, effective, and ethical care.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

6.1. Ensure that the safety of their clients is not jeopardised by the Omission or Commission of any midwifery activity.

6.2. Not abandon care or deprive women of essential health services.

6.3. Never practice midwifery while their ability to perform any professional service is impaired by alcohol or a drug.
6.4. Safeguard the health and safety of their clients against incompetent, unethical or illegal practices.

6.5. Alert the appropriate authority of any situations which endanger the health or safety of clients or colleagues.

6.6. Provide accurate and relevant information when speaking on midwifery or health related matters in public.

**Value Statement 7: Maintain competency in the care of clients**

Midwives shall constantly evaluate their level of knowledge and skills as well as the effectiveness of midwifery care they provide. They shall maintain their competency through continuing education and practice evidence-based midwifery.

**Ethical Practice Points**

Midwives Shall

7.1. Ensure that their midwifery practice is based on the best available evidence in the current scientific literature.

7.2. Keep pace with advances and innovations in midwifery by participating in continuing education activities.

7.3. Take every reasonable opportunity to maintain and improve professional knowledge and competence.

7.4. Practice critical reflection and self-evaluation to assess the levels of competence and effectiveness of care delivered.

7.5. In the context of their knowledge, experience and sphere of authority, assist health care practitioners and midwifery students to develop and maintain professional competence in accordance with their needs.

**Value Statement 8: Advocate for the best interest of clients**

Midwives shall always promote their clients’ interests.
Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

8.1. Ensure clients’ interests and needs are recognized and considered by the entire health care team.

8.2. Safeguard clients from undue coercion to accept or change a particular course of action, if they do not choose to do voluntarily.

8.3. Defend those clients who may be vulnerable and incapable of protecting their own interests.

Value Statement 9: Maintain high ethical standard in conducting research

Midwives shall ensure that research activities are conducted in accordance with sound ethical principles.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

9.1. Ensure that research is conducted in a manner that do not cause harm to their clients or compromise the standards of care they receive.

9.2. Respect their clients’ right to an informed and voluntary consent regarding participation in research, including the right to withdraw.

9.3. Ensure that consent is obtained from a family member, guardian or person(s) legally authorized to make a decision, for those clients who are deemed incompetent.

9.4. Ensure that their clients’ anonymity and confidentiality is maintained.

9.5. Comply with the ethical guidelines for research issued by the appropriate organization.
C. MIDWIVES & THEIR PROFESSION

Value Statement 10: Maintain a practice environment that is conducive to the provision of ethical health care

Midwives shall collaborate with their health care colleagues to maintain an ethical culture in the practice environment through mutual trust and respect for each other’s expertise.

Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

10.1. Respect the values of health care colleagues and collaborate with them to advocate for ethical health care.

10.2. Share knowledge and expertise to resolve ethical issues.

10.3. Support the actions of colleagues who have protected their clients from incompetent, unsafe or unethical care.

10.4. Assume responsibility for reporting health care practitioners whose actions may endanger the safety of clients.

10.5. Have regard to the environment of health care and its physical, psychological and social effects on clients, and to the adequacy of resources. Make known to appropriate persons or authorities any circumstances which could place clients in jeopardy.

Value Statement 11: Promote the profession’s ethical standards and maintain public trust in the midwifery profession

Midwives shall maintain high ethical standards in their professional conduct and strive to preserve the public’s trust and confidence in Midwifery.
Ethical Practice Points

Midwives Shall

11.1. Present the midwifery ethical perspective when serving in communities or participating in civic activities in their professional capacity.

11.2. Advocates fairness when participating in the formulation of health policies or when supporting community or national efforts to meet the health needs of the public.

11.3. Promote fair allocation and efficient use of resources.

11.4. Actively promote equal access to health care that meets the Reproductive health needs of women.

11.5. Provide assistance when an emergency situation arises outside of employment.

11.6. Refuse to accept any gift, favour or hospitality which might be interpreted as either professional endorsement of a commercial product or seeking to obtain preferential consideration as a client.

11.7. Avoid the use of professional qualifications in the promotion of commercial products or services, in order to maintain the independence of professional judgement on which clients rely.

11.8. Act as effective role models in health promotion for women, families, and other health professionals.
Professional Misconduct

Professional misconduct is defined as any act of commission or omission that contravenes acceptable standards for professional and ethical midwifery practice.

Midwives are responsible for any conduct that:

- Causes harm to the client;
- Abuses the professional relationship with the client;
- Brings the midwifery profession into disrepute; may face disciplinary action by the concerned regulatory body/organization.

Professional misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Any breach of professional values and standards as spelt out in the Midwifery Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and the Standards for Midwifery Practice.

2. Any failure to uphold personal and professional integrity in one’s practice, such as:
   a. Falsifying Records;
   b. Abusing Clients Verbally, Physically, or Emotionally;
   c. Abusing the Woman-Midwife Relationship;
   d. Signing or Issuing a Document Containing False and Misleading Information in One’s Professional Capacity;
   e. Practicing While Impaired by or Suffering from Substance Abuse;
   f. Misappropriating Property from Clients or Workplace;
   g. Indulging in Inappropriate Relationships with Clients;
   h. Indulging in Inappropriate Business Practices;
   i. Committing an Act Regarded by the Midwifery Profession as Dishonourable or Unprofessional.
3. Any contravention of statutory requirements, such as:
   
a. Practising without any Valid Midwifery Registration and/or Licences;

b. False Assumptions of Titles or Designations to Deceive Clients;

c. Using another Midwife’s Name and/or Registration in the Course of Providing or Offering Services to Clients;

d. Being Convicted of any Offence that may Bear upon the Midwife’s Suitability to Practise;

e. Being found Guilty of Professional Misconduct by other Regulatory Bodies;

f. Failure to Appear before an Inquiry Convened by the Midwifery Regulatory Bodies and/or Failure to Co-operate with Investigation carried out by the Regulatory Bodies.
References


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Child Development 69(3), 757-777.


Appendix I: Glossary

- **Accountability**: Being answerable and responsible for the outcome of one’s professional actions (includes any judgement, decision, or action taken or omitted in midwifery practice). Midwives are accountable to the client, the employer, and their profession.

- **Advocacy**: Speaking up in favour or support of the client’s interests and wishes.

- **Autonomy**: The right of individuals to determine their own actions and destinies.

- **Client(s)**: An individual or group who seeks or receives professional midwifery care or advice from a midwife.

- **Competence**: Adequately qualified and skilled in performing midwifery duties to at least the minimum standard required.

- **Confidentiality**: Ethical obligation to protect the privacy of client’s personal information.

- **Consent**: Permission given by clients for a procedure or action to be carried out upon them by their attending midwife.

- **Dignity**: Treating the client with respect and consideration for his rights as an individual.

- **Evidence-Based Midwifery**: Refers to the process of
  
  a. Reviewing current research findings (evidence) published in relevant scientific journals and other data sources
  b. Evaluating the relevance of this evidence to the current midwifery practice
  c. Modifying existing practice where indicated
  d. Evaluating the impact of the modified practice

- **Responsibility**: Obligation to properly carry out duties which are expected of a midwife and for which they can be held accountable.

- **Significant Others**: Persons who play an influential role in the client’s life and well-being (e.g. guardian, caregiver, partner).