



Dr Ginger Breedlove, CNM, PhD APRN, FACNM President, American College of Nurse-Midwives

A new standard of care

With roots dating to 1929, ACNM is the oldest women's healthcare organisation in the US. As it approaches its 60th anniversary in 2015, Dr Ginger Breedlove discusses the organisation's shared passion for excellence, partnership and delivering optimal care, revealing its ongoing mission to improve approaches and establish midwifery as the standard of care for women

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) contributes to the advancement of midwifery research and healthcare in the US. Could you briefly outline its overarching objectives?

ACNM is the professional organisation for certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs). We lead the midwifery profession through education, clinical practice, research and advocacy.

A major focus right now is working to ensure midwives are fully mobilised to provide women's healthcare services as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is implemented and millions of women gain access to healthcare coverage.

How did you become involved with ACNM? Could you discuss the duties you fulfil as President?

I became a student member of ACNM during my graduate education at the Medical University of South Carolina in 1981. I started attending the ACNM Annual Meeting, as I felt somewhat isolated as one of very few CNMs in Kansas or the Midwest. At the time, I was working in a free-standing birth centre, and these national gatherings helped me to develop networks with midwives working in similar practices. I also became aware of the value of a professional association and how effective association leaders can drive organisational growth and success.

I proceeded to serve on numerous ACNM committees while also acting as board secretary for six years. Additionally, I became increasingly interested in serving as president to bring my diverse clinical and academic leadership experiences to the position. The president serves many roles, including acting as the voice of the midwifery community to a wide range of national partnerships and activities, leading strategic visioning for the board of directors, connecting and engaging with members, and working in partnership with ACNM's CEO, Lorrie Kline Kaplan, CAE, to ensure effective organisational outcomes.

What are the core values that drive your current work?

Personally, I believe shared passion is the fuel for achieving success. Building relationships with other organisations, stakeholders and

individuals allows us to identify and discuss our common goals and this is the key to achieving our core values. ACNM is driven by nine core values; two in particular resonate with me: excellence and partnership.

ACNM defines excellence as valuing midwifery education, clinical practice and research. We believe in a true commitment to upholding the highest clinical and ethical standards, professional responsibility, accountability and integrity. Additionally, our members build partnerships with women and their families by listening and providing information, guidance and counselling in a shared decision-making process. We partner with other members of the healthcare team through collaboration and referral to provide optimal care and advance the integration of midwifery care into the healthcare system. These partnerships are key to providing high-quality patient care and enhancing our healthcare system overall to achieve better results. We can't work alone.

How does ACNM ensure it is setting the highest standards for midwifery education and practice?

Over the decades, ACNM has established a fine-tuned framework for our profession, which today is one of the most well-respected models for midwifery practice worldwide. ACNM establishes the core competencies, education and practice standards for our profession and continually provides clinical practice bulletins, continuing education and patient education materials on a wide range of topics, based on the latest evidence. Our standards are then translated into academic standards by our sister organisation, the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME), which is a federally-recognised accreditor for graduate education programmes in midwifery.

ACNM's standards and ACME accreditation then form the basis of certification by our national certifying body, the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB). AMCB is considered the gold standard in midwifery certification and is recognised in all 50 states. Certification protects the public by ensuring clinicians have met national criteria for practice. While state licensure provides the legal basis for practice, most states require AMCB certification for licensure, and many institutions require AMCB certification to grant practice privileges.

Could you introduce your consumer campaign, Our Moment of Truth™, and explain how it was developed?

The purpose of Our Moment of Truth™ is to improve women’s health and maternity care in the US by reintroducing midwives and midwifery care as important options that should be normal practice for women’s healthcare services.

In nearly every developed and developing country in the world, midwives are the primary providers of maternity care. In the US, this is not the case, and most consumers and other clinicians aren’t well informed about midwives and their scope of practice. At the same time, shortages of primary care physicians and obstetrician-gynaecologists are well documented, and these shortages are worsening. These trends have major public health implications. We have to ask ourselves: who will care for our daughters and our granddaughters? So we see it as critical to spread the word about who midwives are and what they do. For example, many Americans don’t know that CNMs and CMs have graduate degrees, can prescribe medications, work closely with physicians (often in hospitals) and provide healthcare services to women in all stages of life – not just in pregnancy and childbirth. Our Moment of Truth™ aims to set the record straight and empower women by helping them understand the different care options available.

Amnesty International released a report in 2010 entitled ‘Deadly Delivery: The Maternal Healthcare Crisis in the USA’ on the increase of maternal mortality rates. What are the most effective ways of addressing pregnancy-related complications to save the lives of both mothers and newborns?

The Amnesty International report and others in recent years have helped to bring visibility to the fact that maternal and newborn outcomes in the US are actually worse than in many developed and developing countries with fewer resources. Furthermore, black infants are twice as likely to be born prematurely compared to white infants. This is a national tragedy, and we can and should do better. It is exciting to be working with a number of other stakeholders on significant efforts to improve maternal and newborn outcomes both in the US and around the world.

In 2010, all the leading players in global health came together to issue a Global Call to Action to reduce maternal mortality. This Call to Action

noted that the evidence-based practices associated with improved birth outcomes have been clearly identified, and that up to 90 per cent of maternal deaths can be prevented when midwives are authorised to practice their full set of competencies and are supported by and integrated into the health system. Strengthening midwifery services and improving access to high-quality midwifery care is a global imperative – and that includes the US. ACNM is working on multiple fronts to support this vision.

Could you provide insight into some of the most prevalent conditions affecting reproductive health in the US?

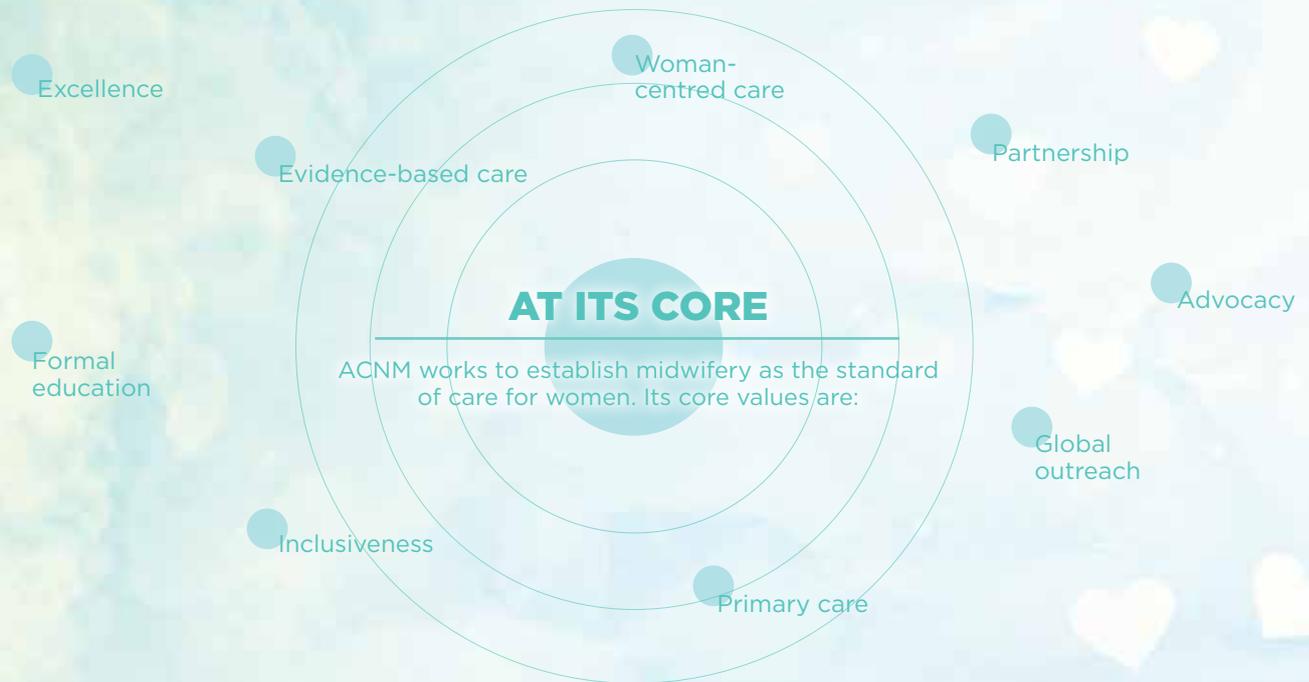
Access to quality care is one of the most significant factors affecting women’s health in the US, which may be improved as more women gain affordable health insurance through the ACA and we work to increase the women’s healthcare provider workforce. ACNM’s survey research in 2012 and 2013 sheds light on important questions about women’s reproductive health. One of the most interesting findings from 2013 was that women do not feel knowledgeable about family planning options – to the point that they actually have harmful misperceptions about the effectiveness of the various options. Healthcare providers have a critical role to play in discussing all forms of birth control options and services in an attentive and engaging manner so women can make optimal family planning choices and avoid unintended pregnancies.

Many women in the US face healthcare obstacles due to financial, bureaucratic and discriminatory issues. How does ACNM ensure medical services are available to all women, independent of their demographic status?

We are on the brink of major changes in the US through the ACA, which will alter the landscape. ACNM is championing the creation of maternity health shortage areas that will allow us to monitor whether there are enough providers to support safe, high-quality childbirth in all parts of the country. We also work to ensure that state and federal laws and institutional policies allow midwives to practice up to the full extent of their education and training without unnecessary barriers that impede access to quality care. If we are to increase our healthcare workforce and improve quality and access, we need to work together to change the legal and regulatory environment that will make these improvements possible.

ACNM is guided by six strategic goals:





Could you discuss the organisation's work in developing countries and how it supports and enables midwives to provide essential primary care for women during pregnancy and childbirth?

Because of the profound role midwives have in women's health in developing countries, ACNM and our members have a strong history of commitment to global health. Through volunteer efforts of our members, as well as through professional staff, ACNM has been working in developing countries for more than 30 years.

At ACNM's Department of Global Outreach we are fortunate to have some of the world's leading technical experts in implementing effective, evidence-based interventions to improve maternal and newborn health, focused primarily on strengthening midwives, midwifery leaders, and professional midwifery organisations. Our work ranges from pre-service and in-service training to community education and mobilisation. We are currently providing technical assistance to projects in Zambia, Ethiopia, Namibia and Guatemala, and through the US Agency for International Development's (USAID)'s Survive & Thrive Global Development Alliance in five other countries.

ACNM's Division of Global Health provides a network for ACNM members interested in or working in global health. The Division promotes evidence-based practices for women's and newborn health, supports the education of midwifery students as global citizens, and increases the visibility of midwifery work internationally by coordinating global research, education, networking and communication within the ACNM membership.

ACNM collaborates with a network of volunteers who donate their time for the progression of midwifery research and healthcare. In what capacity do they contribute?

As with many non-profit organisations, ACNM involves its members in the activities of the College through its board of directors, divisions, committees, taskforces and liaison appointments to numerous national groups and caucuses. A vast amount of what is accomplished by the organisation is due to the volunteer efforts of midwives across the country who contribute their expertise, energy, time and perspective to the work of these groups.

What is the role of the ACNM sister organisation, the A.C.N.M. Foundation, Inc.?

The A.C.N.M. Foundation, Inc. was established in 1967 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting the provision of high-quality maternal, newborn and well woman health services through the practice

of midwifery. The Foundation collaborates closely with, and complements, the goals of ACNM.

The A.C.N.M. Foundation, Inc. engages in a broad programme of activities including: sponsorship of studies, surveys and research; publication and dissemination of essays, treatises and scientific and educational materials; granting of scholarships to nurse midwifery students and postgraduates; participation with, and support of, related public and private non-profit agencies and educational institutions; sponsorship of educational and scientific meetings; and granting of fellowships for midwives who are in doctoral or postdoctoral studies.

Can you reveal the essential tenets of ACNM to date?

As the organisation approaches its 60th anniversary in 2015, we are extremely proud of the hallmarks of our profession, which have been established by the organisation's leaders, with great prescience, over many decades. As a profession, we are deeply oriented toward public health, collaborative relationships, evidence-based practice and partnering with women so they can share in decision-making in an informed manner. The scientific literature provides abundant evidence that we achieve exemplary outcomes. Midwifery care is a great example of low-tech/high-touch care that actually works. This model stands in vivid contrast to the norm of high-tech, high-cost childbirth which has become commonplace in the US, driving up costs without improving outcomes or families' experiences of care.

ACNM's mission is to establish midwifery as the standard of care for women. Evidence-based data have consistently shown that midwifery-led care equals high-quality care. In that spirit, we will continue to address current barriers to midwifery practice in the US while promoting and advocating for women and babies.

Our profession is growing, and we're ready to serve.



www.midwife.org
www.ourmomentoftruth.com