

# Types of Midwives

For centuries women have attended women in childbirth. Women's craft during this unique personal event is recorded in the ancient documents of several cultures and in the Torah. Usually these women had born children themselves and were trained by another midwife by apprenticeship. Their care consisted of going when called to attend women during birth and attending to the newly born infant, using their hands and herbals to comfort the birthing mother, deal with any difficulties and supervise the recovery period. Remaining records show that some of these women were highly skilled and had very good outcomes.

The English word "midwife" means with woman, and the French term "sage femme" means wise woman, which portrays the traditional duties of and the respect with which these women were held. Today, approximately 80% of babies worldwide are born into the hands of midwives, even though there has been a shift in several more affluent cultures from birth at home with a midwife in attendance to hospital birthing. For these countries the shift began during the dark ages when it became popular to call "barber-surgeons" for the most difficult births. In the mid-1600's the invention of obstetric forceps by the Chamberlain family helped to embolden men's foray into childbearing. When the taboo of touching and therefore studying dead bodies was overcome, prejudice against women's roles kept women, and so midwives away from this new knowledge of how our bodies work.

This control of knowledge allowed Physicians, as they formed professional guilds and gained cultural acceptance, to begin to protect their lucrative position through simple slander and later legislation. Despite this, in England and the US and other more developed countries, it wasn't until the early 1900's that women began to choose to birth in the hospital in any significant numbers. This was due to the discovery of ergot for pain relief, and later sulpha drugs for infection. In the US, by 1950 95% of women were giving birth in the hospital. During this transition in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from traditional birth to hospital birth, many laws were enacted that either forbade or restricted midwifery care as an option for birthing women. In the 1960's in the US, interest in midwifery was renewed, and efforts began to form professional organizations and seek secure legal status. It remains a struggle to this day.

Because of the different paths that have been pursued, in order to reassert midwifery as a viable option for birthing women in the US, there are several types of midwives in the United States. This guide is to help you see their differences in order to help you choose the care provider that suits you and your family best. One avenue of practice is not better than another one; each provider has chosen training that they find most helpful.

- *Certified Nurse-Midwife (CNM)*: an individual trained and licensed in both nursing and midwifery. Nurse-midwives possess at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and are certified by the American College of Nurse Midwives. These women are usually trained in a hospital environment and most continue to practice there.
- *Certified Professional Midwife (CPM)*: an individual trained in midwifery that meets practice standards of the North American Registry of Midwives. This credential focuses on and specializes in homebirth. The majority are apprentice-trained, although traditional higher learning options have become available.
- *Direct-Entry Midwife (DEM)*: an independent individual trained in midwifery through a variety of possibilities that include: self-study, apprenticeship, a midwifery school, or a college/university program. If they seek credentialing, it is usually the CPM that they prefer.
- *Certified Midwife (CM)*: an individual trained and certified in midwifery. Certified midwives possess at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and are certified by the American College of Nurse Midwives. Their training and practice is usually hospital centered.
- *Lay Midwife*: an individual who is not certified or licensed as a midwife, but they are trained informally through self-study or apprenticeship. Sometimes called DEM, they also usually prefer the CPM credential when seeking licensure.

