

## Consensus Statement: **Complementary and Alternative Therapies**

The New Zealand College of Midwives recognizes that complementary and alternative therapies (CAT) or medicines (CAM) such as homoeopathy, rongoa, herbal therapy, aromatherapy, naturopathy and acupuncture may have important effects on the progress of pregnancy, labour and birth, and the postnatal period for both the woman and her baby.

Midwives incorporating these therapies into their practice should either have undertaken a recognised education programme or refer clients to appropriately qualified practitioners.

### Rationale:

- Midwives recognize that women receiving midwifery care may choose to use CAT or CAM throughout their maternity experience <sup>1,4</sup>
- The use of complementary therapies may assist women in becoming more in tune with their bodies and to utilise mind-body connections to help themselves throughout their childbirth experience.
- Complementary and natural remedies should be treated with the same caution and degree of expertise as any other clinical intervention.
- Pregnant women should be made aware that few complementary therapies have been established as safe and suitable to use during pregnancy.
- Complementary and alternative therapies or medicines are a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine.
- Various forms of healing, such as therapeutic touch, massage, relaxation, meditation, visualisation, and environmental manipulation (e.g. the use of colour, music, quiet, aroma, etc) are, and always have been, a part of midwifery practice. This is, and continues to be, recognised and valued.

### Practice Notes:

- Midwives incorporating complementary and alternative therapies into their practice should have either undertaken a recognized education programme or have referred their clients to the appropriately qualified practitioners <sup>1,3</sup>.
- Each therapy has its own underpinning theory, and it is essential to understand the mechanism of action, indications, contraindications and precautions, side-effects and complications relating to each therapy or remedy used by, or advised on, within midwifery practice
- If midwives use any complementary therapy as part of their work as midwives, they have to have the skills, knowledge and competencies that are required to prescribe and/or administer the therapy.
- The use of CAT or CAM requires documenting in the woman's notes needs to identify information shared and decisions made regarding the use of complementary therapies during the pregnancy, birth and postnatal period <sup>2</sup>
- Follow up and on- going assessment of the effectiveness of any use of complementary therapies is the responsibility of the practitioner who prescribed and/or administered the therapy <sup>1</sup>.
- Midwives should ask women about their use of complementary or natural therapies. It is important for maternity health professionals to be aware of their use, to avoid adverse reactions and/or interactions with conventional care and pharmaceutical preparations.

## References:

1. Ministry of Health, (2007). Primary Maternity Services Notice, Pursuant to Section 88 of the NZ Public Health and Disability Act 2000, Wellington: Ministry of Health
2. New Zealand College of Midwives, (2015). *Midwives Handbook for Practice*. Christchurch: NZ College of Midwives
3. Ministry of Health, (2012). Guidelines for Consultation with Obstetric and Related Medical Services (Referral Guidelines). Wellington: Ministry of Health
4. Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health. (2004). Complementary and Alternative Health Care in New Zealand. Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health [www.newhealth.govt.nz/maccch.htm](http://www.newhealth.govt.nz/maccch.htm) ISBN 0-478-28287-7, Booklet. ISBN 0-478-28288-5, web.

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Smith, C. Crowther, C & Beilby, J. (2002) Acupuncture to treat nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy. A randomized controlled trial. *Birth* 29 (1) 1-9

## Ratification:

*This statement was ratified at the NZ College of Midwives AGM  
Original Statement ratified 1995  
References updated 2000, 2004, 2009, 2018*

The purpose of New Zealand College of Midwives Consensus Statements is to provide women, midwives and the maternity services with the profession's position on any given situation. The guidelines are designed to educate and support best practice. All position statements are regularly reviewed and updated in line with evidence-based practice.