

Listening to Members, Building Common Ground

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One of the many ways in which ACNM ensures we are listening to our members is the way we operate the 2 ACNM business meetings at the Annual Meeting. Our business meetings have a unique feature: any member can bring motions to the floor for discussion with those present and consideration by the Board of Directors. This allows for a level of direct interaction that is rarely seen in organizations of our size.

The following motion was proposed at the 58th Annual Meeting last June: *that the BOD create a planned and professionally-run initiative, both electronic in preparation for the Annual Meeting and face-to-face at the Annual Meeting, in which members can share, discuss, dialogue and debate their concerns, questions, fears and hopes related to midwifery's relationship with nursing and the other arm of midwifery in all critical areas, i.e., practice, education, law, and politics. This initiative would bring the US MERA process to the grassroots of ACNM with the goal of enhancing understanding, clarifying misperceptions and identifying common beliefs.*

We first posted the motion on the ACNM Town Hall e-Midwife Discussion Group shortly after last year's Annual Meeting to allow for member input and discussion. Next, we'll have an open forum at this year's 59th Annual Meeting in May. If you plan to attend the meeting, review the history of the US MERA project below to help prepare you for our dialogue.

History of the US MERA Project

The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) endorsed new global midwifery standards, competencies, and tools in 2011. These documents describe the "Three Pillars" of midwifery: education, regulation and association. These pillars were built upon the foundation of the ICM Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice and the ICM Definition of a Midwife.

Following this, the US midwifery organizations that represent education (ACME and MEAC), regulation (AMCB and NARM), and association (ACNM, MANA, NACPM) expressed a desire to articulate a collaborative response to these global standards by the next triennial ICM Congress in 2014. These 7 organizations also agreed that in order for a single, clear response to come from US midwives, we all needed to undertake work internally to address a history of misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mistrust. Representatives of each midwifery organization agreed to conduct gap analyses to compare the new ICM Global Standards and the Essential Competencies with their respective current standards, competencies, regulations, and member association capacity.

The 7 organizations appointed a work group charged with developing the framework for a facilitated meeting; the work group was named United States Midwifery Education, Regulation, and Association

(US MERA). US MERA obtained funding from the Transforming Birth Fund to hire a consultant to help facilitate the work.

Goals for the facilitated meeting were as follows:

- Describe a history that reflects the ongoing efforts to move professional midwifery forward in the United States, including identification of challenges and accomplishments.
- Engage in a dialogue that creates a deeper understanding of current strengths and challenges for US midwifery.
- Develop knowledge and trust to support successful ongoing communication.
- Identify opportunities for future collaboration.
- Conduct a collaborative analysis of the ICM's Education, Regulation, and Association pillars as they apply to US midwifery.

The facilitated meeting was held this April near metro Washington, DC. Thirty-five representatives from the 7 US MERA organizations spent 2 days working with the facilitators to open dialogue, actively listen, share information, and build trust – this led to a monumental improvement in our ability to understand and interact with each other. We achieved all of the goals originally set for the meeting except the collaborative analysis of the ICM pillars, which we began but did not complete.

Next Steps

We must move what we learned in April out to the grassroots level, complete the collaborative analysis of the ICM pillars, and formulate a joint response. The Transforming Birth Fund has awarded US MERA a second grant to continue this work and hold another facilitated meeting this coming April – the steering committee is currently working on the goals for this meeting. The meeting will likely focus on educating each other about issues and trends affecting each of the credentials, as well as sharing information on how each credential is educated, credentialed, and regulated.

Those of you who plan to attend the Denver meeting are welcome to add your voices to the discussion during the forum. If you cannot attend the Annual Meeting, you can also share your thoughts directly with me at cfulea1@gmail.com, and I will bring your ideas forward. A monthly summary of the US MERA meetings will be posted on ACNM Town Hall list serv and at www.midwife.org/US-MERA.