USE OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Background

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) refers to a broad set of health care practices that are not integrated into the dominant health care system. It has been estimated that as many as 87% of women use CAM during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatally (1). Substances include but are not limited to: aromatherapy essential oils, herbal, homeopathic and Bach flower remedies. These can be self-administered or given through consultation with practitioners, including acupuncturists, reflexologists, osteopaths and hypnotherapists. This growth in the use of CAM in maternity care presents midwives with new challenges. Knowledge of and appreciation of the risks and benefits of these therapies are an essential aspect of midwifery care even when the midwives are not be directly involved in administering or advising on them (4,2).

Midwives should not incorporate CAM into their practise without obtaining a post registration qualification which is recognised by the appropriate professional body, thus enabling the midwife the right to practise a particular therapy, and registration in the area of Alternative Medicine.

In addition, many complementary and natural remedies continue to be under-evaluated and some are not amenable to randomised control investigative methods. There is evidence that some therapies are not safe or appropriate for use during pregnancy and childbirth (5)

Key Points

- Midwives caring for women who choose to consult independent practitioners of complementary therapies and natural remedies should encourage women to ascertain that the practitioners are credentialed to work with pregnant women
- Only midwives who have undertaken post registration educational qualifications in specialised techniques and modalities of the recognised CAM should administer or advise pregnant women
- These qualifications should be recognised by the appropriate professional body as giving the practitioner the right to practise a particular therapy and registration in the area of Alternative Medicine
REFERENCES / STANDARDS


National Standards – 1- Care Provided by the Clinical Workforce is Guided by Current Best Practice

4 Medication Safety

Legislation - Australian Nursing Federation Complementary Therapies in Nursing Practice: Endorsed June 1998, reviewed and re-endorsed May 2008

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Code of Professional Conduct for Midwives in Australia 2008

Australian College of Midwives , Code of Ethics for Midwives September 2001

Related Guidelines / Policies – Nil

Other related documents – Midwifery care when a Client Makes a Decision that Is Incompatible with the CMP Midwifery Standard of Practice

RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Sponsor Nursing & Midwifery Director OGCCU

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Do not keep printed versions of guidelines as currency of information cannot be guaranteed.

Access the current version from the WNHS website.

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