

NURSING & MIDWIFERY COUNCIL

NMC Circular 10/2006
SAT/CS
3 April 2006

Dear Colleague

Midwives and Exposure Prone Procedures

This circular has been written to clarify the NMC position relating to Exposure Prone Procedures in midwifery practice. The NMC has received increasing numbers of queries from Heads of Midwifery and other professional colleagues, about activities that should not be undertaken by midwives who have reason to believe they may have been exposed to, or are carriers of, the HIV virus or other blood-borne infections.

The information in this circular is relevant to:

- Midwives
- Supervisors of Midwives
- Local supervising authority midwifery officers
- Employers of Midwives
- Women
- Other professional colleagues

¹*‘Exposure prone procedures are those invasive procedures where there is risk that injury to the worker may result in the exposure of the patient’s open tissues to the blood of the worker (bleed-back). These include procedures where the worker’s gloved hands may be in contact with sharp instruments, needle tips or sharp tissues (e.g. spicules of bone or teeth) inside a patient’s open body cavity, wound or confined anatomical space where the hands or finger tips may not be completely visible at all times.’¹*

Following a detailed analysis of each step in the process of performing an episiotomy, application of fetal scalp electrode and infiltration of local anaesthetic and the

¹Extract from ‘HIV Infected Healthcare Workers: Guidance on Management of HIV infected workers and patient notification. DOH

physiological processes involved in bleeding following an injury, the UK Advisory Panel concluded that these activities were not exposure prone procedures.

The NMC Midwifery Committee has considered the conclusions of the Advisory Panel and has therefore revised its view on what constitutes an exposure prone procedure in relation to midwifery practice.

Exposure Prone Procedures

- suturing repairs following episiotomy or perineal tears

Suturing of the perineum following episiotomy or perineal tears is the only activity routinely undertaken by midwives which is classified by the Department of Health as an Exposure Prone Procedure.

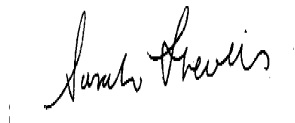
Not Exposure Prone Procedures

- vaginal delivery
- amniotomy using a plastic device
- attachment of fetal scalp electrodes
- infiltration of local anaesthetic prior to an episiotomy
- episiotomy (performed with episiotomy scissors)

Enquiries

Enquiries about the contents of this NMC Circular should be directed to the Midwifery Department on 020 7333 6549 or by email midwifery@nmc-uk.org

Yours sincerely



Chief Executive and Registrar