



Royal College
of Midwives

Position Statement

doulas



The Royal College of Midwives position

The RCM supports a woman's choice to engage the services of a doula to provide emotional, physical, practical and social support.

The RCM believes that doulas should be directly commissioned by women. There is a potential conflict of interest if they are employed by the NHS.

The RCM is clear that doulas must not provide clinical care at any time. They should never be used as substitutes for midwives or support workers or to compensate for staffing shortages.

The RCM advises against student midwives or midwives also working as doulas to avoid any conflict between the two distinctive roles.



Background and context

A doula supports a woman and her family in the antenatal period, during labour and in the postnatal period. The support is tailored to the woman and may be emotional, physical, practical or social. A doula should be empathetic, compassionate and calm.

The role of the doula is not regulated though some doulas complete training programmes through accredited providers, such as Doula UK. The majority of doulas are employed directly by their clients, however there are some who are unpaid volunteers working in NHS organisations.

The number of women engaging doulas throughout their maternity pathway is increasing. On some occasions social services may provide a vulnerable woman with a doula for additional support. This may reflect some of the pressures faced by maternity services and the fact that a significant number of women meet multiple midwives during their pregnancy and have not met the midwife caring for them in labour.

Many midwives have a very positive collaborative relationship with doulas. However, the RCM is aware that on some occasions this is not the case. This may be because there is a lack of understanding about the different roles of midwife and doula, and how they work alongside each other. The RCM acknowledges the potential for conflict between the roles, as experienced by some of our members.





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Further reading

Doula UK, 2017 About Doula UK [online] Available at: <https://www.doula.org.uk/about-doula-uk> [Accessed 18 January 2016].

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) 2009 Standards for Competence for registered midwives. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/additional-standards/standards-of-competence-for-registered-midwives> [Accessed July 19 2017].

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) 2015 The Code: professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives. Available at: <http://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/nmc-publications/revise-new-nmc-code.pdf> [Accessed July 19 2017].