

# **Practice Directive**

## **Discontinuing Care with a Client**

**College of Nurses and Midwives of Prince  
Edward Island**

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## ***Introduction***

An effective midwife-client relationship is based on mutual trust and respect. This enables the provision of safe and effective care. Circumstances may arise in which either the client or the Registered Midwife (RM) decides to end the midwife-client relationship. RMs must be aware that ending the midwife-client relationship can have significant consequences for the client. The RM must attempt to address any issue with the client and determine the difference between a difficult situation and an unsafe situation.

## ***Circumstances for a Decision to End the Midwife-Client Relationship***

### **Client request**

Clients are the primary decision maker with respect to their health care and can request that the midwife-client relationship end for various reasons. A client may decide that midwifery care is not appropriate for their circumstances or may relocate outside of the RMs area while pregnant.

### **Breaches of trust**

Breaches of trust can occur in absences of mutual respect and trust. Once a breach of trust is found to exist in a midwife-client relationship, a midwife may not be able to continue to provide safe care, in which case they may choose to terminate care, though they must allow the client a reasonable opportunity to arrange for alternative services.

### **Clearer definition of breach of trust**

An RM may find themselves in a situation which requires a report of suspected child abuse and/or neglect through various pieces of legislation in PEI (for example, Regulated Health Professions Act, Child Protection Act). This can be an overwhelming and upsetting experience for a client and can automatically undermine trust in their RM.

Where possible, midwives should:

- Contact the client prior to making a report to Child Protection Services and advising the client of the RM's legal obligation to make the report;
- Offer to call CPS together with the client;
- Notify any other RMs involved in the client's care about the report being made;
- If it is necessary to terminate the midwife-client relationship, informing the client that their care is being terminated and arranging for an appropriate transfer of care in a timely manner.

An RM may find themselves with a client who is questioning the RM's competence and suggesting that they would feel more comfortable receiving care from another midwife or health care provider. An RM should listen to their client's concerns and attempt to address them, for example, a failure to communicate the rationale for an RM's opinion on managing

a certain aspect of the client's care may be the reason. This may be able to be easily clarified, and the midwife-client relationship may resume without any distrust remaining. However, if a client suggests that their trust in the RM's knowledge, skill and judgment has been undermined and the RM has been unable to remediate the client's concerns, the RM should offer to transfer the client's care to another RM or health care provider, depending on the client's wishes.

In some cases, the behaviour of a client and/or their support persons can result in a breach of trust. For example, if a client or a client's spouse repeatedly uses aggressive language toward the RM or makes demeaning comments, an RM may feel unsafe in continuing to provide care and may end the midwife-client relationship. Inappropriate behaviour also includes crossing professional boundaries, such as a client or support person making sexual advances or comments to an RM. RMs must always assess whether such behaviour would undermine their ability to provide care to a client that is safe and, in the client's, best interest. If the RM's ability to provide care is compromised, then the RM should end the midwife-client relationship.

A client and/or their support person(s) may pose a risk of harm to the midwife, the RM's colleagues and/or other clients by being physically aggressive. In such cases, the RM should immediately end the midwife-client relationship. RMs are also reminded that if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a person is likely to cause bodily harm, they have a duty to warn the people at risk and the authorities. If the person who will likely cause harm is the client, the duty to warn transcends any confidentiality and privacy obligations that are otherwise owed to that client.

### **Disruption in Service, temporarily or permanently**

When an RM is no longer providing services for a period of time (such as a leave of absence) or ceasing provision of care permanently, client care will be affected. An RM should give ample notice of the disruption or discontinuation of care to each client for whom the RM has primary responsibility, within a reasonable amount of time. The RM must follow Employer policies related to transfer of care.

### **Requests for care outside midwifery standards**

Clients may request care that is outside of the RM's standards of practice. RMs must follow the CNMPEI policy on [Requests for Care Outside Midwifery Standards](#).

### **Full course of care completed**

It is natural for the midwife-client relationship to end once the full course of midwifery care has been provided. No further care is provided to the client after discharge and the midwife-client relationship comes to its natural conclusion.

### **Disrespectful client**

If an RM find themselves with a client who is not respecting the RM due to age....; the RM should connect with the RM team to discuss and offer the client the option to obtain care from another RM and the RM can also terminate the RM-client relationship ...

### **Termination of Engagement by Client**

Stop attending appointments, terminate communication – sending communication to state that RM have attempted to contact and are considering the relationship terminated unless t they hear something back as a result of the letter, with an associated timeline

### ***Circumstances for a Decision Not to End the Midwife-Client Relationship***

The Prince Edward Island Human Rights Act prohibits an RM from ending the midwife-client relationship based on a client’s age, colour, creed, disability, ethnic or national origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, political belief, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or source of income.

### ***General obligations***

Irrespective of the reason for ending the midwife-client relationship, RMs have general obligations they must adhere to, including the following:

- Document all discussions and decisions,
- Provide adequate notice to clients of the termination,
- Make arrangements for health care services to be provided to the client by another health care provide,
- Ensure the client is aware of how to access their midwifery records,
- Ensure that the client’s midwifery records are stored and transferred in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act,
- Provide complete and accurate client information to the health care provider that is assuming care,
- Ensure that clients can access the results of any tests that have been ordered,
- Ensure that any abnormal test results are followed up on by another health care provider in a timely manner.

In addition, it is recommended that the RM speak with the client directly either in person or by phone to advise the client of the termination of the midwife-client relationship and the reasons.

The midwife-client relationship may come to an end for various reasons. RMs must ensure that ending the relationship or the manner in which the termination occurs will not contravene any legislation, practice standard, or College policy.

## **References**

College of Midwives of Manitoba, (2020). *Guidelines on Discontinuing Care with a Client*. Accessed on April 6, 2022 from <https://www.midwives.mb.ca/document/5698/Guideline%20on%20Discontinuing%20Care%20with%20a%20Client.pdf>

College of Midwives of Ontario, (2021). *Guidelines on ending the Midwife-Client Relationship*. Accessed on April 6, 2022 from <https://www.cmo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guideline-on-Ending-the-Midwife-Client-Relationship-2021-1.pdf>.

Prince Edward Island, (2016) *Human Rights Act*. Accessed on April 22, 2022 from <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/H-12%20-Human%20Rights%20Act.pdf>

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