

The genesis of the ACNM 1971 Statement on Abortion.

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In 1971, the Board of Directors of the American College of Nurse-Midwives approved a statement that prohibited certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) from performing abortions. In 1990, the statement was superseded by a second "Statement on Abortion," which essentially reworded the 1971 statement with no substantive change. In 1991, 20 years after the first statement was adopted, a resolution was approved at the Annual Meeting recommending that the Board of Directors rescind the statement, thereby allowing individual CNMs to utilize the guidelines for the incorporation of new procedures into nurse-midwifery practice if she/he decides to provide abortions. This article describes the historical basis for the initial 1971 statement in the hope that an understanding of that history will assist nurse-midwives as they reconsider the statement.

In 1970 the New State Abortion Reform Bill was passed. At the time it was the most liberal abortion law in the US. Its passage would result in a massive increase in the number of abortions performed every year in the state of New York. The number increased from around 1000 to 97,881. Since there was much discussion about who was going to perform these extra abortions, the Board of Directors of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) passed a statement that prohibited certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) from performing abortions. This justification for this decision was not based on religious or moral arguments. Instead, it was argued that abortion was a surgical procedure outside the expertise of CNMs and should only be performed by licensed physicians. It has been speculated that part of the motivation for the decision was a fear that CNMs would be drafted in large numbers to perform abortions. It has also been speculated that the decision was influenced by controversy created by a CNM who was already performing abortions. A study was conducted that involved asking CNMs who were active at the time, what their remembrances were of the events leading up to the statement. 21 people were interviewed and anonymity was assured. The ACNM has changed very much in the last 20 years. Back then the members were a homogeneous group trying to establish themselves as legitimate health care providers. Today, the membership is much more diverse with CNMs having very different opinions about what CNMs should and should not do and what their goals should be. In 1990 a 2nd statement on abortion was issued which was essentially the same as the 1st. Then in 1991 a resolution was approved at the Annual Meeting recommending that the Board of Directors rescind the statement. Thus, CNMs can now decide for themselves what procedures they can perform.