Things to Keep in Mind When Joining Your First Practice

Congratulations on having completed the educational requirements allowing you to practice as a new registrant in Ontario. You may have received, or will soon receive, an offer to complete your new registrant year in a midwifery practice group. The new registrant year introduces new opportunities but also new challenges into your life. The Association of Ontario Midwives (AOM) is committed to supporting you during this vital stage in your career. This tip sheet is designed to assist you in successfully making the transition to your role as a general registrant in the province. Remember that as a new registrant you will be a self-employed, contracted member of the partnership of the practice group, not an employee, and as such it is your responsibility to ensure that you are both meeting the requirements of and able to take advantage of the benefits of being a self-employed worker. The following six tips are provided for your consideration.

1) The importance of a written agreement or contract

Once you have a verbal offer of a new registrant position, be sure to ask for a written offer and a copy of the contract (often referred to as an "agreement"). Agreements used by midwifery practice groups are often called the Mentored Midwife Retainer Agreement (for graduates of the MEP) or the Supervised Midwife Retainer Agreement (for graduates of the IMPP or those midwives for whom the College of Midwives of Ontario (CMO) requires a period of supervision). Likely the practice group partners will have based these agreements on AOM template documents which can be accessed for comparison at http://www.aom.on.ca/Members/Business_Administration/Practice_Guides_and_Agreements.aspx. If you are not yet a midwife member of the AOM, they can also be provided upon request by contacting programs@aom.on.ca.

Prior to entering into a working relationship with any other party, including visits with new midwifery clients, you are encouraged to ensure that the agreement is signed by yourself and the partners, and that you retain a copy for your records. Most agreements will include some conditions. These most commonly relate to the confirmation of:

- funding for a New Registrant at the practice by the Ontario Midwifery Program and TPA and/or
- hospital privileges.

The purpose of a signed contract is to ensure that all parties to the agreement are clear about their expectations within the relationship and to outline how any challenges are to be managed if they arise. The Association is aware of a number of instances where the absence of a contract has led to serious difficulties in resolving disagreements or disputes to a new registrant’s satisfaction.
It is prudent to not commit to moving your home until you have a confirmed agreement, hospital privileges and, if required, an approved CMO supervision plan in place as, sadly, sometimes these expectations fall through at the last minute.

2) Ensuring the agreement reflects the terms and conditions discussed during the interview process

It is extremely important to ensure that the written contract you are asked to sign reflects the understandings and agreements that were discussed either during the interview process or in the context of ensuing conversations when a verbal or written offer might have been made.

As indicated above, the written agreement helps to clearly define the rights and responsibilities of both parties while they are members of the practice group, upon leaving the practice group and after leaving the practice group. In addition to ensuring effective communications about verbal agreements and understandings, signing a contract is particularly important to protect your own rights in the unfortunate event that things don’t work out. You should not commence any work with the practice group until the contract has been signed by both parties.

In addition to the agreement, practice groups will have administrative protocols and procedures that you are agreeing to commit to by signing the agreement. Be sure to review all relevant practice group documents that outline some of the more practical aspects of how the practice group is managed, and what your rights and obligations will be when you are part of the group, and if and when you leave the practice group.

The agreement or protocols referred to in the agreement (either explicitly or implicitly) should clearly outline how a practice group will compensate you, both for clinical and non-clinically related work. For those who may have financial commitments such as student loans, you may want to discuss the possibility of compensation options (e.g. advancing funds prior to the discharge of initial clients). Any such agreements should be clearly outlined in the written contract. Given that practice groups cannot bill for care until after the woman gives birth, you may receive your final compensation cheque after the day your new registrant contract ends.

Many midwifery practice groups build up caseload for new registrants. If you are not staying on beyond your new registrant contract, it would be reasonable, in return, for the practice to expect you to contribute to clinical workload during the time when your own caseload starts to decrease. You may want to discuss what your responsibilities will be near the end of your contract once assigned clients have delivered. For example, will you continue to be on call and attending clinic?

Some new graduates might be concerned that by focusing on the specific details in a contract partners may interpret this as “mistrusting or difficult behaviour.” On the contrary, reviewing the
details of practice group relationships demonstrates a professional, mature and responsible approach to engaging with members of a practice in what is, in fact, a contractual relationship. Reviewing, amending and negotiating the terms of the contract allow both parties to demonstrate their commitment to effective communications and the pursuit of a positive, healthy relationship. By making it your goal to start things off on a positive note, your efforts will go a long way in helping to build trust and good will.

3) Seek legal counsel regarding the agreement

In 2006, the AOM sought legal counsel in order to develop guides and template agreements to assist midwifery practice groups in their development of agreements for the range of independent midwife contractors including supervised and mentored midwives. These documents are TEMPLATES designed to be altered to suit the unique setting and nature of individual midwifery practice groups. Do not assume that because an agreement resembles an "AOM template" that this renders it "acceptable" for you to sign. Neither should you be concerned if your agreement appears very different to the format of an AOM template. Some practice groups will have consulted their own legal counsel who may have used a different format and style.

In the same way the AOM advises practice partners to seek legal counsel in drafting a contract, you are also strongly advised to have a lawyer review it. The money you spend on legal fees for this purpose can be considered a well-spent investment as it may help protect you from potential future disputes and financial losses. In choosing a lawyer you may wish to:

- ask other midwives or colleagues if they have used a lawyer they would recommend;
- consider whether the lawyer or firm has previously worked with midwives, and/or has experience with "contract law";
- ask more than one law firm or lawyer about their fees and the type of legal work that they are experienced in.

The Law Society of Upper Canada’s website has resources to assist the public in finding appropriate legal assistance, [http://www.lsuc.on.ca/faq.aspx?id=1146](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/faq.aspx?id=1146). They also offer a Lawyer Referral Service which midwives may wish to use by calling 1-800-268-8326 or 416 947 3330 (within GTA) or consulting their website at [http://www.lsuc.on.ca/faq.aspx?id=1146](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/faq.aspx?id=1146).

4) Review and discuss plans for orientation to the midwifery practice group

While this tip may be less relevant for new registrants who have already spent some time during their studies in the practice where they will be working, it is still important to ensure that you receive an orientation to both clinical and business operations. The latter may be particularly
important, as the focus for the majority of midwifery students relates to clinical practice. 
Becoming more aware of business operations will be useful in the future should you become an 
associate, a partner, or wish to establish a new practice. It will also help you to understand how 
you fit into the business of the present practice group.

The Midwifery Practice Management Guide (formerly called the AOM Business Guide for 
Midwives), recently updated, is a resource highly recommended for all new registrants 
interested in learning more about the business aspects of midwifery practice groups. The guide 
is available online by using the Practice Management tab in the Members-Only section of the 
AOM website.

The Association encourages all practices to provide an orientation for new registrants 
or midwives prior to commencing client care. The AOM developed a template titled Orientation 
Practice Group Protocol, which can be found at the following link once you are a member of the 
AOM, or can be provided upon request by contacting programs@aom.on.ca. 
http://www.aom.on.ca/Members/RMSAM/Practice_Group_Administration.aspx.

An orientation to the hospital where you have privileges will also be important even if you have 
already completed one during your midwifery education as you will have additional obligations 
and rights once you obtain hospital privileges. Your orientation should also include an 
introduction to relevant community agencies providing services to childbearing families.

Part of becoming established as a practicing midwife involves obtaining the equipment you will 
need to set up practice. If this has not already been discussed, ask about how the practice 
manages the selection of your own birth bag and equipment. According to the funding 
agreement with the Ontario Midwifery Program, the new registrant is considered the owner 
immediately upon receipt of the equipment. The CMO’s published standard, *Essential 
Equipment, Supplies and Medications* (reference) may be useful to you in making these plans.

5) Operationalize plans for your new registrant year including mentoring/supervising your practice

During the interview process you may have discussed partner expectations about your roles 
and responsibilities as well as their plans for providing mentorship and support. You may have 
expressed your particular needs with respect to midwife/practice group support in consolidating 
and developing your midwifery skills. As a new registrant, you will be obliged to meet the 
requirements of the College of Midwives of Ontario as outlined in the New Registrants Policy. 
(1) In order to ensure that your new registrant year is successful, educational and positive for all 
those involved, it may be worthwhile developing an ongoing "mentorship or supervision plan." 
Check to see if your practice has an established orientation or mentorship plan protocol.
The following is a list of points to consider as you begin your new registrant year:

- Plan for and schedule regular mentorship or supervision meetings to ensure regular and ongoing communications.
- Discuss who in the practice will provide ongoing mentoring/supervision. (For larger practices, determine who will be responsible for various aspects of the midwifery group practice (i.e. business vs. clinical operations).
- Review the practice group process for assessing the fulfillment of your contract as a new registrant.
- Confirm your understanding about whether or not there is a caseload waiting for you. Talk about how many clients will be assigned to you, particularly if the client base is relatively low.
- If you need to build your own client base, discuss how your efforts in this will be supported. You should also discuss what will happen if there have not been enough clients prior to the end of your contracted term.
- Are client care and/or chart reviews part of the orientation/mentorship process and how is this managed within the practice?
- Ask if the hospital requires a period of supervision and, if so, for how many births. Discuss who will be responsible for supervision requirements in the hospital.
- Ask if the practice requires a period of supervision for attending home births and, if so, for how many.
- Discuss and document plans for how you or practice members will raise and manage issues of concern should they arise.
- Review with the partners their process for dispute resolution.
- Remind the partners of any particular interests/skills you have and wish to develop during your year as a new registrant.
- Clarify what roles and responsibilities outside clinical services (i.e. teaching prenatal classes, outreach) you are being asked to fulfill and if/how you will be compensated for this work.
- Ask about how the practice will support and promote you as a member of the practice group and ensure you are fully integrated into the practice/community/hospital settings.
- If there is a desire to remain with the practice beyond the end of your new registrant year, discuss whether base caseload exists within the practice that would allow you to remain, or if the existing caseload must be expanded and your extension beyond your new registrant year would be pending Ministry funding approval. Discuss what the expected timeline would be for approval and a commitment to the extension of the contract.
- If it is expected that you will stay beyond your new registrant year, discuss long-term plans for growing the practice and clarify individuals' roles and responsibilities for applying for funding to allow this to happen.
6) **Take advantage of your AOM membership**

The "Member Handbook" contains valuable information about the wide range of activities carried out by the AOM, and the many benefits of your membership including your access to professional liability insurance, the PLEASE line and LifeWorks program. Be sure to consult the handbook as it provides an excellent introduction to your professional association. A copy will be emailed to you as part of your welcome package once you have been officially registered as a member of the AOM.

The AOM website is another resource for you to consult and recommend to others. There are two sections; a public and a ‘Members Only’ section. The public site provides a wide variety of documents about midwifery care and features the "find a midwife" tool, which provides links to individual midwifery practices and midwives. The Clinical Practice Guidelines are available from the public site. Once you become a member you will be given a user name and password to access the ‘Members Only’ section, which provides additional resources to support you in your professional practice.

The AOM represents and advocates on behalf of Ontario registered midwives and relies on the active participation of its members in all of the work it does. We invite you to become involved. Attending regional meetings, sharing resources, or participating as a member of the Board or working groups and committees are some of the ways in which you can engage with the AOM.

**References**


**Additional Resources**

Below is a list of additional documents and, where available, website links that may be of particular interest to new registrants. If you are not yet able to access the ‘Members Only’ section of the website, please contact programs@aom.on.ca or programadmin@aom.on.ca to ask for a copy to be sent by post.


