

**THE SUPERVISION OF MIDWIVES IN THE CITY  
OF NEW YORK.**

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Prior to 1907, any woman residing in the City of New York who desired to practice midwifery, was allowed to do so, if she would present in person, at the office of the Department of Health, a certificate of good moral character, and of proper experience in midwifery signed by two physicians, and register her name at the office of the Registrar of Records. She was not subjected to any supervision whatever, nor were her qualifications investigated or questioned, except upon the receipt of some complaint against her.

For many years this method was apparently successful, as the class of foreign midwives coming to this country had been well trained in regular schools of midwifery, and accustomed to rigorous supervision, but, as the character of immigration changed, the class of midwives also changed and before long we had in our midst many midwives who had not completed a course of midwifery and others who had been denied diplomas. In addition, in our own city, we had at that time no accepted standard for midwives, or any official training school. As the foreign population rapidly increased, thus creating a demand for the services of midwives (for it is entirely by that population that the midwife is employed) many women totally lacking in the necessary qualifications were able, through the very limited requirements, to enter the profession. In the course of a few years we had, in consequence, a number of untrained midwives, totally unfit to assume such responsibilities as that profession demanded. Complaints against the midwives became more and more numerous, and finally the Department decided to take active steps to control and supervise the practice of midwives.

At that time, strange as it seems to us now, the Department of Health had not been empowered by the State Legislature with any authority in regard to the control of midwives. Efforts were shortly made by the Department toward the enactment of such a law, and an Act regulating and restraining the practice of midwifery in the City of New York became a law June 6, 1907, with the approval of the Governor.

This law of 1907, Chapter 432, reads as follows:

Section 1. The Department of Health of the City of New York is hereby vested with power and authority to adopt rules and regulations and adopt ordinances governing the practice of midwifery in the City of New York, including rules and regulations and ordinances for admission to said practice, the exclusion



from said practice, and the regulation and inspection of midwives and the practice of midwifery generally, in the City of New York.

Section 2. As used in this act the practice of midwifery means the offering or undertaking by any person to assist for a compensation of any kind a woman in normal child-birth, but it does not include at any child-birth the use of any instrument, nor the assisting of child-birth by an artificial, forcible or mechanical means, nor the performance of any version, nor the removal of adherent placenta, nor the administering, prescribing, advising or employing in child-birth of any drug other than a disinfectant. This act shall not be construed as applying to any practitioner of medicine duly authorized to practice medicine and registered according to law, nor shall it authorize any midwife to practice medicine.

Section 3. Any person who shall practice midwifery in the City of New York in violation of any rules, regulations and ordinances promulgated by the Department of Health shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Section 4. This act shall take effect immediately.

On November 6, 1907, the Board of Health adopted the following section of the Sanitary Code:

Section 184. No person other than a licensed physician shall practice midwifery in the City of New York without a permit of the Board of Health authorizing such practice, and no person unless authorized by law to do so shall conduct a lying-in-hospital, home, or place for the care of pregnant and parturient women, or advertise, offer, or undertake to receive and care for them at such place, or at his or her home, without a permit from the Board of Health.

The Department of Health now empowered with proper authority, and, after a thorough investigation of local conditions and a careful study of the methods employed by various European countries, adopted in the latter part of 1907 certain rules and regulations. In 1909 the supervision of midwives was placed under the direction of the Bureau of Child Hygiene, and steps were taken to secure adequate control of the situation.

All midwives known to be engaged in the practice of midwifery in the City of New York were visited by Medical Inspectors who explained to them the recent enactment of the law governing the practice of midwifery and requested them to call in person at the Department of Health office and make an application for a permit to practice midwifery. The following questions appear on the application blank: name, age and address of the midwife; social condition, single, married or widowed (if married the maiden name also); names under which midwife has practised midwifery; the amount of general education received;



training in midwifery whether in school of midwifery or from private physician, giving his name, address and number of cases conducted under his supervision—whether or not midwife has ever been arrested on a criminal charge, and if so, the full particulars and results. Then signature of midwife and date of application. In addition the application must be endorsed by two physicians who state the length of time they have known the midwife, and the number of cases she has conducted under their supervision. It is also endorsed by some layman, preferably a clergyman, who vouches for the moral character of the midwife, and states the length of time he has known her. These applications when properly filled out are returned to the Bureau of Child Hygiene where they are registered, then forwarded to a Medical Inspector for investigation.

The Medical Inspector calls upon the midwife, noting on the application blank the name and wording of her sign, the character of the house, private house or tenement, the number of rooms and condition of same, whether clean and orderly or otherwise, the personal appearance of the midwife, whether neat and clean or otherwise. Inquiries are made in regard to the training of the midwife. If obtained at a school of midwifery, the diploma is inspected and the name and address of the midwife noted; name and location of college or school issuing the diploma; date of issuance. If trained by private physicians, the names and addresses of such physicians and the number of cases which the midwife conducted under their supervision.

The equipment of the midwife is next inspected. This should contain certain articles prescribed by the Department and should be kept in a cleanly condition. Certain articles are prohibited, such as:

- Uterine syringes,
- Uterine dressing forceps,
- Obstetrical forceps,
- Specula,
- Sounds or applicators,
- Metal catheters,
- Examining chairs or tables,
- Drugs, other than specified in rules and regulations.

The stubs of birth records are also examined and their neatness and accuracy noted. When all conditions are satisfactory and the equipment is complete in every way, the application is signed and dated by the Medical Inspector and returned to the Department office where it is filed for future reference. The Board of Health then grants to the midwife a permit to practice midwifery, which expires one year from date of issuance. The midwife is duly notified and again calls in person at the office of the Bureau of Child Hygiene, receives her permit, a book of Rules and Regulations governing the practice of midwifery in the City of New York, and in addition a supply of silver nitrate solution which must be used according to the rules and regulations.



Each month the midwife is visited by the Department nurse who inspects her home and equipment. If any complaints are made against the midwife, regarding her work, or she is accused of criminal practice, etc., an investigation is made by the Medical Inspector and the matter properly adjusted.

At the end of the year when the permit is about to expire, the midwife again sends in an application and is visited by the Inspector and the same investigation made as formerly.

It can easily be seen what an enormous responsibility the Department of Health has assumed, and few people know of the many difficulties with which the Department is obliged to cope.

In earlier days many of the midwives visited were graduates of well known midwifery schools abroad, and were therefore loathe to submit to the Departmental inspection of their homes, and obstetrical outfits. They could not at first realize that the granting of permits by the Department and the supervision of their practice was a great advantage to them, for by it the standard was raised and many untrained and unscrupulous persons were prohibited and excluded from practicing midwifery. Moreover, by the supervision of the Department of Health, the midwives were protected from unjust accusations, as all complaints against midwives, such as incompetence, criminal ignorance or negligence, criminal abortions, etc., are carefully investigated by the Bureau of Child Hygiene. In many instances such investigations have resulted in the complete exoneration of the midwife.

It was found among the Latin races and some others, that many diplomas granted were issued in the maiden name of the midwife, while upon her sign was given the married name. In this way many graduated midwives have been twice enumerated by investigators other than those connected with the Department of Health, and an incorrect estimate made of the number of midwives practicing in New York City as well as those licensed by the Department of Health.

In 1913 there were in the City of New York 1,344 licensed midwives:

Nationality	Total	Per Cent.
Austrian.....	278	20.6
Italian.....	355	26.4
German.....	311	23.1
Russian.....	206	15.3
United States.....	123	9.1
Norway-Sweden.....	18	1.3
England-Wales.....	18	1.3
Swiss.....	9	.7
French.....	13	1.0
Finnish.....	4	.3
Greek.....	2	.1
Turkish.....	3	.2
Holland.....	2	.1
Miscellaneous.....	2	.1



While the number of midwives has considerably increased in the past six years, the ratio of various nationalities has not materially altered. Among the European schools represented are the midwifery schools of Naples, Palermo, Catania, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Lemberg, Czernowitz, Kief, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, Christiania and Copenhagen.

There have been for some years several private training schools for midwives in the City of New York, but it was not until 1911 that a free training school was established. This school, under municipal control, was organized by the trustees of Bellevue and Allied Hospital for the purpose of giving women who desired to practice midwifery an opportunity to secure a practical training to fit them for this work. The length of the course is six months, a portion of which time is devoted to outside work, attending patients in their homes under the directions of a physician and nurse.

#### **Outline of Course.**

- (1) Instructions in the principles of hygiene as regards the home, food-supply, person, etc.
- (2) In the elementary anatomy of the female generative organs and pelvis, including pelvimetry.
- (3) Pregnancy and principal complications, including abortion.
- (4) Symptoms, mechanisms, course and management of normal labors.
- (5) Presentations; palpation, auscultation and vaginal examination.
- (6) Antiseptics; their preparation and use.
- (7) The management of the puerperium, normal and abnormal.
- (8) Hemorrhage; varieties and treatment until arrival of doctor.
- (9) Puerperal fevers; nature, causes and symptoms.
- (10) Preparation of dressings and room for labor, including baths, douches, irrigations, catheterization, care of instruments, etc.
- (11) Drugs as used by midwife.
- (12) Care of infant, with special emphasis on eyes and cord.
- (13) Infant feeding and home modification of milk.
- (14) Care of infant apparently lifeless.
- (15) Ethics, rules and regulations of Board of Health, legal status, etc.

#### **Diplomas.**

A diploma is given to the pupils who complete satisfactorily the prescribed course, and have successfully passed the examinations given at the close.

At the present writing, while conditions are by no means ideal, there is a vast improvement. A standard for midwives has been fixed and a municipal training school has been established and now it is no longer possible as in former days, for a midwife to obtain from the Department a permit to practice midwifery when she has no training in midwifery other than that afforded by attending a number of obstetrical cases under the supervision of a private physician. The midwife must be a graduate of a school of midwifery recognized by the Department as maintaining a certain standard.

On January 1, 1914, the following rules and regulations pertaining to schools of midwifery were adopted by the Board of Health.

## RULES AND REGULATIONS OF BOARD OF HEALTH RELATING TO SCHOOLS FOR MIDWIVES.

### **I. General Conduct of Schools.**

The school must be conducted under the supervision of a hospital recognized by the Department of Health.

The school must have facilities to accommodate at least ten pregnant women during the lying-in period, and facilities for their confinement on the premises.

The school must have a resident physician and one or more registered nurses.

The permit must be displayed in a conspicuous place.

Violation of any of the rules and regulations of the Board of Health may lead to the revocation of the permit.

### **II. Requirements for Entrance to the Schools.**

In order to take a course of instruction requirements for entrance into the school must include the following:

(1) Applicant must be at least 21 years of age, be free from any disease that might be communicated during the practice of midwifery, and must present a certificate of recent vaccination.

(2) Applicant must give for reference the names and addresses of two persons, not relatives, who have known the applicant for a number of years.

(3) Applicant must fill out the application blank (in her own handwriting) including at least name, present address, age, whether single, married or widow, education, height, weight, general physical condition, including sight and hearing.

### **III. Instruction and Course of Study of Schools.**

The Instruction and Course of Study at the school must include the following:

(a) A probation period (of at least two weeks) to determine the fitness of the applicant.



(b) A course of study of at least six months duration.

(c) Pupils to reside at the school during the entire course.

(d) Pupils to be on duty at least ten hours daily, or 70 hours weekly.

(e) Time lost by absence to be made up.

(f) Each pupil to have attended at least twenty cases of labor, and have had the care of at least twenty mothers and new-born infants during the lying-in period (ten days).

(g) The instruction given to pupils must equip them with a thorough theoretical and practical knowledge of obstetrics, and must at least include:

(1) The principles of hygiene: (a) the home (b) food supply and (c) person.

(2) The elementary anatomy of the female generative organs and pelvis.

(3) Pelvimetry.

(4) Pregnancy: (a) symptoms (b) complications.

(5) Normal labor: (a) symptoms (b) mechanics (c) course (d) management (e) presentation (f) palpation (g) auscultation (h) vaginal examination (i) asepsis (j) antiseptics; their preparation and use.

(6) Puerperium: (a) normal (b) abnormal.

(7) Hemorrhage: (a) varieties (b) treatment.

(8) Puerperal fevers: (a) causes (b) symptoms.

(9) (a) Preparation of dressings and room for labor (b) methods of giving baths, douches and irrigations (c) performances of catheterization (d) care of instruments.

(10) Care of infants: (a) asphyxia (b) eyes (c) cord (d) hygiene of infancy (e) infant feeding (f) home modification of milk.

#### **IV. Recognition of Schools Outside of New York City.**

A school conducted in the United States outside of New York City will be recognized by the Department of Health if it is under State or Municipal control, and all of the requirements hereinbefore mentioned are fulfilled.

A school conducted in a foreign country will be recognized by the Department of Health if it is under the control of the Government, maintains a resident course of at least six months, and gives a course of instruction equal or superior to that described above.