

MANA's President Responds to Recent Controversies in the Media

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I appreciate the thoughtful conversations that have occurred in response to the ABC report on the controversies in California and Oregon. Good, strategic dialog is always welcome.

First of all let me say it is too bad people are so willing to jump to conclusions about media coverage of midwifery issues when we know how often we are misquoted and intentionally or inadvertently misrepresented. That is the situation that happened this week. And we, like you, were very unhappy. Next time, I would appreciate it if people would call or email me or any MANA Board member and ask, "What's up? Is this what you meant to say?"

Jill Breen, our 1st VP with oversight of our committee chairs, contacted Susan Moray, MANA's Press Officer, immediately after hearing of this controversy. Here is what Jill reported to the MANA Board.

"I spoke to Susan Moray, and she said she was misquoted. The media was looking for a statement related to the California case of the midwife who (unintentionally?) attended a birth unassisted before she was licensed, and now that she is licensed they are taking her license away. Susan was asked about the two states that have voluntary licensure, and she responded that she lives and practices in one of them, Oregon.

Susan was speaking as a midwife practicing in Oregon where voluntary licensure is working well. She did not intend her statement to indicate that MANA holds a position on mandatory licensure. She was speaking as an Oregon midwife but was quoted as MANA's spokesperson as "press officer".... The appropriate answer should have been that MANA supports the legislative efforts of midwives according to the needs of their particular state in order to provide more access to midwifery care for mothers and families."

So as you can see, in the recent article MANA's press officer, Susan Moray, shared her state professional organization's position on voluntary licensure. She did not intend for the position of the Oregon Midwifery Council to be taken as MANA's position. The press spun it to appear as it did.

At the same time I sent this response to a reporter—an ABC affiliate who contact me this week, to clarify our position:

"To clarify things, MANA does not take a position against mandatory licensure. Because midwifery licensure is the purview of each state—50 of them—and they each are seemingly doing things a bit differently, we support the collaboration among individual state governments, midwives, and midwifery consumers

to put regulations in place that assure that trained, skilled, and highly qualified midwives are caring for women and infants, state-to-state, across our nation. We respect the rights of states with unique histories and political climates to create their own regulatory and legislative guidelines around licensure.”

That is how MANA is responding to this conversation. Oddly enough, MANA is currently in the process—as we speak—of expanding our media response team to be more efficient, timely, and accurate. We know this is an area in which we need improvement, and we are investing resources to get ourselves there as quickly as possible. Remember, most of our board, committee chairs, and staff are volunteers and practicing midwives, and our response time is not as good as it might otherwise be if we had a person dedicated solely to PR. We are looking for dedicated members to join our media response team. If you know of anyone, please have them contact us at info@mana.org.

In terms of the issues of the Certified Professional Midwife and licensure, let me say two things: First, MANA is 100% behind the CPM. How could it be otherwise? She was imagined, conceived, and created within the nest of MANA as a credential by and for midwives. We are 100% in support of moving the CPM into mainstream systems of care so women have greater access to a model that is safe, satisfying, less expensive, and tailored to meet the needs of women. We see the CPM—with its multiple routes to entry—as a credential that is more accessible to midwifery aspirants including

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those in marginalized and vulnerable populations and is a key solution to addressing disparities in maternal and child healthcare. We support the states (consumers, midwives, and legislators) in creating regulations that will bring CPMs to the table as part of the maternity care team so CPMs can enjoy the benefits of other accepted MCH practitioners and work as the effective care providers we know they are.

But secondly, MANA is a professional organization that provides a place for all types of midwives. As a professional organization, we are unique in that we have struggled to create an open-armed and inclusive ethic that does not exclude traditional midwives or others who are identified as community-based midwives. Until our membership tells us they want to change the nature of our organization, we will support all midwives. And we welcome a conversation if midwives in our organization want to address this issue again. In addition, we have standards and core competencies (and have had them from the beginning) that define what is expected of a person who holds herself/himself out as a qualified midwife. The safety of mothers and babies is of utmost importance in this whole conversation, and the right of women to make informed choices about where and with whom they give birth.

I, and my fellow leaders in MANA, look forward to having the conversations that allow us to change and evolve as the profession and the culture around birth changes. I feel strongly it is important for us to grow our profession to meet the needs of our members and those we are serving. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share some thoughts with you and to clarify a few things.

Geradine Simkins,
President & Interim Executive Director of MANA