APPROPRIATE USE OF CAESAREAN SECTION

BACKGROUND
Vaginal birth is becoming less common as caesarean section rates rise steadily in many countries. Birth by Caesarean section has implications beyond the prevention of maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality, both for the present and future health of mothers and babies. It appears that the rate of increase in some countries is related more to the threat of litigation, or to service and social needs, than to the existence of new evidence for the need to change practice.

Caesarean section can be a life saving intervention for mother and baby when vaginal birth is contraindicated. However, it is associated with increased morbidity and mortality and may impact negatively on a woman’s future reproductive health. Birth by caesarean section also places extra demands on maternity services and provision of resources. Evidence based clinical criteria should be the basis for performing a caesarean section.

POSITION
The ICM is seriously concerned regarding the inappropriate use of Caesarean section when evidence-based clinical criteria are not met. Therefore the ICM:

- encourages the collection of data to monitor the ongoing global situation
- encourages midwives to be proactive as advocates for individual women and normal birth
- urges midwives to develop their educational and health promotional role amongst women
- works with obstetric colleagues to promote normal birth and the appropriate use of caesarean section
- encourages the collection of data on the appropriate use of financial and human resources

RECOMMENDATIONS
Member associations are urged to encourage the national adoption of evidence-based criteria and standards for the performance of caesarean sections that will result in maximum health gain for women and babies. Member associations are also urged to
support midwives in their health education and advocacy roles and to monitor the outcomes in terms of intervention and vaginal birth rates.

Member associations are urged to promote vaginal birth and the use of evidence-based criteria for the performance of caesarean section within their countries. Midwives should be supported in their health promotion, education and advocacy roles.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS
ICM position statement. Appropriate intervention in childbirth. (2011)

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Adopted at Vienna International Council meeting, 2002
Reviewed and adopted at Durban International Council meeting, 2011
Due for next review 2017