



THE DISTINCTIVE IMPORTANCE OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

No matter the country, pregnancy and childbirth are momentous events with deep personal and social significance in the lives of women, families and communities. The well-being of women and newborns is interconnected and depends on whether women are supported throughout pregnancy and childbirth.

Women and newborns can both be marginalized in the process of childbirth and the ensuing months. Preventing maternal and newborn deaths and disability is not enough. Care during this period must adhere to basic human rights, including the rights to respect, dignity, confidentiality, information and informed consent; the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and freedom from discrimination and from all forms of ill-treatment. Together, the woman with her partner and family should be supported to care for and make the best decisions for their newborn.

A woman's relationship with maternity care providers and the maternity care system during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period is vital. Women's experiences with caregivers can empower and comfort or inflict longterm damage and emotional trauma, adding to or detracting from women's confidence and self-esteem. Newborns' experiences with caregivers also have significant and lasting impact: newborn babies feel pain and discomfort, and can experience emotional distress, particularly when separated from their families in the first hours of life. Good early care also has a lasting positive impact on the health and well-being of newborns throughout their lives. Women's memories of their childbirth experiences and the treatment of their newborns stay with them for a lifetime, and are often shared with other women, contributing to a climate of confidence or doubt around the healthcare system.



→ Find out more at whiteribbonalliance.org/rmcresources

A broad group of stakeholders representing research, clinical, human rights and advocacy perspectives came together to develop this charter. The campaign to promote respectful maternity care is led by White Ribbon Alliance.

The charter is based on widely accepted human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is also supported by regional human rights instruments such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, among others.

Cover photo: Karin Scherbrucker. Inside left photo: © 2000 Rick Maiman, Courtesy of Photoshare.

RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE



THE UNIVERSAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN & NEWBORNS

Created from established international & regional laws. Grounded in human rights.



THE UNIVERSAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN & NEWBORNS

RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE CHARTER

I. Everyone has the right to freedom from harm and ill-treatment.

No one is allowed to physically hurt you or your newborn. You should both be taken care of in a gentle and compassionate way and receive assistance when experiencing pain or discomfort.

II. Everyone has the right to information, informed consent, and respect for their choices and preferences, including companion of choice during maternity care and refusal of medical procedures.

No one is allowed to force you or do things to you or your newborn without your knowledge or consent. Every woman has the right to autonomy, to receive information, and provide informed consent or refusal for care. Every parent or guardian has the right to receive information and provide informed consent or refusal for their newborn's care, in the newborn's best interests, unless otherwise provided by law.

III. Everyone has the right to privacy and confidentiality.

No one is allowed to share your or your newborn's personal or medical information, including all records and images, without your consent. Yours and your newborn's privacy must be protected, except as necessary for healthcare providers to convey information for continuity of care.

IV. Everyone is their own person from the moment of birth and has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

No one is allowed to humiliate, verbally abuse, speak about or touch you or your newborn in a degrading or disrespectful manner. You and your newborn baby must be cared for with respect and compassion.



V. Everyone has the right to equality, freedom from discrimination and equitable care.

No one is allowed to discriminate against you or your newborn because of something they think or do not like about either one of you. Equality requires that pregnant women have the same protections under the law as they would when they are not pregnant, including the right to make decisions about what happens to their body.

VI. Everyone has the right to healthcare and to the highest attainable level of health.

No one may prevent you or your newborn from getting the healthcare needed, or deny or withhold care from either one of you. You and your newborn are entitled to the highest quality care, provided in a timely manner, in a clean and safe environment, by providers who are trained in current best practices.

VII. Everyone has the right to liberty, autonomy, self-determination and freedom from arbitrary detention.

No one is allowed to detain you or your newborn in a healthcare facility, even if you cannot pay for services received.

VIII. Every child has the right to be with their parents or guardians.

No one is allowed to separate you from your newborn without your consent. You and your newborn have the right to remain together at all times, even if your newborn is born small, premature or with medical conditions that require extra care.

IX. Every child has the right to an identity and nationality from birth.

No one is allowed to deny your newborn birth registration, even if they die shortly after birth, or deny the nationality your newborn is legally entitled to.

X. Everyone has the right to adequate nutrition and clean water.

No one is allowed to prevent you and your newborn from having adequate nutrition, clean water or a healthy environment. You have the right to information and support on child nutrition and the advantages of breastfeeding.



This updated charter clarifies and clearly articulates the rights of women and newborns while receiving maternity care within a healthcare facility. It delineates how human rights are implicated during the time of pregnancy and childbirth and affirms the basic inalienable rights of women and their newborns. Many of these rights are well established in international law and have been interpreted and applied to issues arising during pregnancy, childbirth and the care provided immediately after birth. These rights are well-known and articulated in separate human rights conventions, however, to affirm adherence to them during pregnancy and childbirth, we have brought them together in one document with that singular focus.



The Respectful Maternity Care Charter: Universal Rights for Women and Newborns addresses the issue of disrespect and abuse toward these distinct rights holders who use maternal and newborn care services. It provides a platform for improvement by:

- ★ Raising awareness of women's and newborns' human rights guarantees recognized in internationally adopted United Nations and other multinational declarations, conventions and covenants;
- ★ Highlighting the connection between human rights guarantees and healthcare delivery relevant to maternal and newborn healthcare;
- ★ Increasing the capacity of maternal, newborn and child health advocates to participate in human rights processes;
- ★ Aligning women's demand for high-quality maternal and newborn care with international human rights law standards;
- ★ Providing a foundation for holding governments, the maternity care system and communities accountable to these rights; and
- ★ Supporting healthcare workers in providing respectful care to women and newborns and creating a healthy working environment.

INALIENABLE RIGHTS