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## How to Assess Whether Your Advice or Action Falls within the Doula's Scope of Practice

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*by Penny Simkin*

How can you assess whether your action or advice is outside or within the doula's scope of practice?

Ask yourself the following questions about the action or advice:

1. Are there claims of specific medicinal or healing benefits from the "remedy" (as opposed to soothing a normal pregnancy or labor discomfort) or claims to correct or cure an abnormality?
2. Are there any possible harmful side-effects?
3. Does the action or advice on this subject require special training, certification, or extra education to ensure safety and proper application?
4. Does the remedy usually require a prescription or supervision of a trained clinician?
5. Is the subject on which you are giving advice usually covered by a doctor, midwife, or maternity nurse?
6. Might your advice conflict with that of your client's clinical care provider?
7. Might your action or advice worsen the relationship between your client and her caregiver?

If the answers to all the above questions are "No," then the action or advice is probably acceptable within the doula's scope of practice. If the answer to one or more question is "Yes," then you should not do it.

### Appropriate Actions and Advice

*Following is a list of doula actions or advice that are probably within the doula's scope of practice as assessed by the above 7 questions.*

- Ginger, mint, raspberry leaf teas, other widely available teas to soothe pregnancy discomforts, enhance normalcy
- Acupressure for nausea, headache, specific muscle or joint pain
- Aromatherapy with pre-mixed scented lotions, oils (or those prepared by the client herself)
- Emotional support/reassurance for woman and partner regarding pain, stress
- Hot packs, cold packs to woman's trunk (not perineum)
- Soothing massage for relaxation, pain relief
- Positions to promote comfort in labor
- Positions to prevent prolapsed cord, if no clinician is present
- Advice to use music or partner's voice to encourage breech baby to turn
- Advice on questions to ask of caregiver regarding a specific topic
- Reminding client to ask questions about a procedure that differs from her wishes
- Providing or referring to a text for general information regarding specific questions
- Reminding client tactfully if a change in her birth plan is or may be occurring

- Requesting help or advice from clinical staff if woman or baby appears in distress or physical trouble
- Mediating between client and nurse/caregiver when there is disagreement or misunderstanding
- Helping woman adjust to unexpected or inevitable changes
- Assistance with baby's early breastfeeding

### **Conditionally Appropriate Actions and Advice**

*Following is a list of actions or advice that are within the doula's scope of practice IF the client's caregiver has been consulted and has no clinical objection. Numbers in parentheses refer to the question numbers (from the previous page) that indicate the concern.*

- Teas or tinctures to start labor (1, 2, 3, 6)
- Homeopathic remedies (1, 2, 3, 4, 6)
- Castor oil (2, 6)
- Acupressure to start or stimulate labor (2)
- TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (2, 3)
- Telling a woman that she and/or her baby are fine, that there are no problems (3, 5, 6, 7)
- Applying warm packs to your client's perineum in second stage (6, 7)
- Positions to turn a breech baby (2)
- Positions to promote labor progress (2, 7)
- Removing electronic fetal monitor cords from your client (4, 5, 6, 7)

### **Unacceptable Actions or Advice (Outside the Doula's Scope of Practice)**

*Following is a list of actions or advice that are clearly OUTSIDE the doula's scope of practice. Numbers in parentheses refer to the question numbers that indicate the concern.*

- High doses of vitamins (1, 2, 6)
- Aromatherapy through the use of essential oils (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Interpretation of electronic fetal monitoring tracing or other tests (3, 4, 5, 6, 7)
- Moxibustion or abdominal massage to turn a breech baby (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)
- Clinical advice, such as to go or not to go to the hospital, to accept or not accept an intervention (5, 6, 7)
- Questioning the caregiver's judgment, honesty (6, 7)
- Telling the caregiver directly what the client wants or does not want (7)
- Contradicting the caregiver's orders or advice (6, 7)
- Performing vaginal exams (2, 3, 5, 6, 7)
- Performing perineal massage (6, 7)
- Taking and interpreting blood pressure (2, 3, 5, 6, 7)
- Checking and interpreting fetal heart tones (2, 3, 5, 6, 7)