On Sept. 29, 2004, certified nurse midwife Anne Mariella attended the first birth at the Center for Midwifery (CFM) at University of Colorado Hospital. Hundreds of miles away, Jessica Anderson soon took notice.

Anderson, a certified nurse midwife practicing in Wisconsin, was looking for a change. “I wanted to find a practice in an academic center,” she said. When a position with the CFM opened up, she applied. She was hired and joined the CFM Jan. 1, 2005. She wasn’t overwhelmed with work. Midwives at the CFM attended a total of six births that month.

“I was thinking, ‘Whoa, did I make the right choice?’” Anderson recalled.

Nearly a decade later, Anderson no longer wonders about that. She’s one of seven certified nurse midwives in a well-established practice that serves women on the Anschutz Medical Campus, at University Internal Medicine-Lowry, and at the Lone Tree Health Center. Six of the seven deliver babies.

Business is brisk, Anderson said. The CFM had a record 55 births in August, and the schedule at the Lone Tree practice, which opened in April, is full.

“It’s the fastest growth we’ve seen,” Anderson said.

It didn’t come easily. The CFM built the practice steadily by spreading the word through marketing and promotional materials, media coverage, talks at conferences, referrals from community providers, and the addition of patient-friendly options like water birth. The most effective promotion, Anderson said, came from patients themselves.

“Patients would tell friends and family about their great experiences with us. The news got out through word-of-mouth,” Anderson said.

**Identity issues.** She acknowledged, however, that the practice doesn’t want growth to change its purpose and identity. Since the hospital moved to the Anschutz Medical Campus in 2007, the CFM has operated as a private-practice model. Expectant mothers meet each midwife and receive a range of services from the prenatal period through birth and beyond.

The nurse midwives work closely with physicians at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and the Birth Center at UCH. “The physicians here are open to our ideas and thoughts and are supportive of the midwifery model of care.”

That means giving women a greater degree of personalized care and attention than is typically available in the necessarily highly structured hospital environment. The CFM offers music, aromatherapy, candles, and other sources of comfort, as well as options for pain relief ranging from massage to TENS (transcutaneous...
electrical nerve stimulation) units to epidurals. But it’s not a world unto itself. A physician is always available if a concern arises.

The key differentiator for the CFM is what Anderson called “high-touch” care – a concept the midwives want to protect.

“With our growth we have put an emphasis on maintaining our philosophy and partnership of care. It’s why women come to us,” Anderson said.

**Five and four.** Ghena (pronounced “Jenna”) Burson, 36, knows her different child-delivery models. She has nine children, ranging in age from 12 years to 10 months. She delivered her first five babies in the hospital, attended by OB/Gyns in Cheyenne, Wyo., where her husband was stationed with the Air Force.

After the emergency C-section birth of her fifth child, Burson said she wanted to find a practice that would allow for a natural delivery of her next baby. She also wanted more personal attention than she felt she had received from her OB/Gyns. When her husband transferred to Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, Burson contacted the CFM and arranged an appointment.

She was impressed with the thoroughness of the initial exam, which addressed her physical concerns, such as back and neck pain and circulation issues in the legs. The CFM recommended chiropractic and acupuncture for help with the circulation problems, which she got in the community.

“They treated me as a whole person,” Burson said.

She met and was favorably impressed with all the midwives, she said, but formed an especially strong connection with Anderson, who was the attending midwife for Burson’s next four births. The two maintained the bond even after Burson and her husband moved to Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs.

“We appreciated the care so much that we continued to drive up,” Burson said.

**The long and the short.** Burson is living proof that no two births are the same. She delivered her eighth baby in roughly three minutes after a frantic dash to the hospital, even before Anderson could get there, Burson said. The ninth was far different. It took 13 hours and took place while her husband was deployed in Qatar – the only time he’d missed a birth. Anderson helped arrange for him to be virtually present on Facetime and came through the room periodically to explain to him and the couple’s two oldest daughters what was happening with Ghena’s labor, Burson said.

For that birth, Burson also had an epidural to help manage pain – a first for her. Anderson talked her through it, explaining that the medication could slow down the child birth, but agreeing that it was important to keep Burson comfortable. The two worked through the labor, Anderson using oil and massage to relax Burson and helping her to change positions and push.

“She did what I needed for optimal care,” Burson said.

The two may not meet in a delivery room again – the Bursons are now at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala. – but Ghena Burson is an advocate for the CFM and for nurse midwifery.

“You can truly get the best of both worlds,” Burson said. “You deliver in a medically sound hospital environment with all the care options available, but you don’t give up the connection with a woman who is invested in you and will allow the birth to be what you want it to be.”

She praised Anderson’s mix of clinical skills and compassion.

“She is very knowledgeable, but had a preference for my desires,” Burson said. “That’s an invaluable consideration for something as sacred as bringing a life into this world.”
An Ancient Practice that Never Gets Old

The practice of midwifery is probably as old as human history and is referred to in the Book of Genesis. In America, it’s been around since colonial times. Today, it’s solidly established in the health care environment, and midwives are in all 50 states, working collaboratively with physicians to help women stay healthy through pregnancy, birth, the post-partum period, and beyond.

According to the American College of Nurse Midwives, certified midwives and certified nurse midwives attended slightly fewer than 315,000 births in the United States in 2012. The number has risen slowly but steadily since 2000.

All seven nurse midwives at UCH’s Center for Midwifery are board-certified by the American College of Nurse Midwives and are licensed as advanced practice nurses in the state of Colorado:
» Jessica Anderson
» Amy Artmann
» Nicole Chesser
» Leigh Golden
» Jessica Howard
» Jessica Pettigrew
» Anne Williams