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FOR DOULA ACCESS

PRINCIPLES OF DOULA SUPPORT IN THE HOSPITAL

“One of the most effective tools to improve labor and delivery outcomes is the continuous presence of support personnel, such as a doula.”

—*Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery*, Consensus Statement, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, March 2014

A doula is a trained childbirth professional who provides non-medical physical, emotional, and informational support to clients and their families before, during, and after birth. This document outlines the doula’s role during the hospital stay.

What a doula does:

- Offers culturally sensitive emotional and informational support to the client and her support person(s).
- Supports the client’s choices surrounding the birth, regardless of the doula’s personal views.
- Facilitates positive, respectful, and constructive communication between the client, the support person(s), and the medical team.
- Recognizes that the doula operates within an integrated support system, including the client’s family and medical care providers, and facilitates informed, collaborative decision-making.
- Encourages the client to consult medical caregivers on any areas of medical concern. A doula does not speak for the client but may prompt the client to ask questions regarding her care/treatment.
- Offers help and guidance on comfort measures such as breathing, relaxation, movement, positioning, comforting touch, visualization, and if available, hydrotherapy and use of a birth ball or peanut ball.
- Supports and assists with initial breastfeeding during the first few hours after birth, and provides postpartum support during the hospital stay.
- Adheres to patient confidentiality in accordance to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations.

What a doula does not do:

- Diagnose medical conditions or give medical advice.
- Make decisions for the client or project the doula’s own values/goals onto the client.
- While in the doula role, perform clinical tasks such as vaginal exams or assessing fetal heart tones.
- Administer medications.
- Interfere with medical treatment in the event of an emergency situation.

CREATING A DOULA-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL



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A doula-friendly hospital is one that:

- Recognizes that the doula has been chosen by the client to be a part of the labor support team, and includes the doula as part of the integrated team for the birth.
- Allows the doula in the labor and delivery room, whether or not the allotted number of support people has been reached.
- Ensures that the doula is treated with respect.
- Understands that the doula supports the client and her desires.
- Allows and supports non-medical comfort techniques for labor, including but not limited to varied labor positions, movement, breathing techniques, aromatherapy, comforting touch, visualization, hydrotherapy, and the use of a birth ball and/or peanut ball.
- Facilitates the provision of continuous, calming support by allowing the doula to be present in triage and, absent a compelling reason to the contrary, for procedures such as epidural insertion and cesarean section.
- Ensures that the doula is able to support the client post-partum, while at the hospital, for breastfeeding and additional comfort measures.

High-quality scientific research strongly and consistently supports the benefits of doula care:

- A 2017 Cochrane systematic review analyzed data from 26 studies involving more than 15,000 women and concluded that based on the documented benefits, all women should have access to doula support.
- A review of 41 birth practices in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* in 2008 using the methodology of the US Preventive Task Force concluded that doula support was among the most effective of all those reviewed, one of only three U.S. practices to receive an “A” grade.
- In “Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery,” the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) reported that continuous labor support is an underutilized strategy for reducing unnecessary C-sections, suggesting the need for policy changes to increase access to doula care, particularly for those at greatest risk of poor outcomes.

References: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD003766.pub6/full>;
[https://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378\(08\)00775-8/fulltext](https://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378(08)00775-8/fulltext); <https://www.acog.org/Resources-And-Publications/Obstetric-Care-Consensus-Series/Safe-Prevention-of-the-Primary-Cesarean-Delivery>