

Marta Michalska-Uras
michalska.uras@gmail.com
November 11, 2021

Value of Birth Support

The Efficacy of Doula Support

“Why consider a doula? Childbirth is intense, demanding, unpredictable, and painful, and it can last for a few hours to 24, 36, or even more. Even if you are well prepared, you and the pregnant person may find it difficult to apply your classroom learning in the real situation.”¹

“A doula is far more than a glorified cheerleader. In fact, doula-attended births are associated with demonstrably better outcomes.”² Research has proven that hiring a doula shortens length of labor and delivery, lowers the risk of infections and complications stemming from oxytocin administration, emergency cesarean, episiotomy or other interventions.

From a psychological point of view women who hired a doula have a greater feeling of satisfaction from their birthing experience and their self-esteem grows. The bond between a mother and her partner is often strengthened because of lower expectations towards the partner who might know nothing about labor and delivery. “The doula usually meets with you in advance, is on call for you, arrives at your home or the hospital when you need her, and remains with you continuously, with few breaks, until after the baby is born.”³

An important fact is that a doula is an often missing connection between mother (and father or other support person) and medical personnel - nurses and doctors. Staff working in a hospital often has no time for lengthy explanations and weighing pros and cons of certain interventions,

¹ The Birth Partner

² The Mama Natural

³ The Birth Partner

while doula definitely has all the time and knowledge and she is focused on only one laboring mother during all phases of birth. “Hospital nurses and midwives rarely remain in the room throughout labor, as they have duties outside the room and are often taking care of more than one laboring patient at a time. They work in shifts, so over the course of labor, several different professionals are likely to be involved in each laboring person's care.”⁴

“Reducing pain in labor depends upon staying relaxed, working with one's body, and feeling confident, reassured, and in control.”⁵

Western culture model of birthing has pretty much eliminated the importance of emotional support of laboring mother. The moment labor and delivery moved from home environment to hospitals, the support of women was replaced by care of nurses and doctors. Hospital organization, shifts, often a big number of women in labor at the same time cause that being admitted to Labor & Delivery has become a bad experience for many women. Often, the Birth perspective is on two sides of the spectrum:

“On one end of the spectrum, child-birth is viewed as a normal physiological event that follows a natural course. Interventions needed for these natural deliveries are seen as minor, although the personnel must remain alert for any medical sign of complications. Minimal medications are used, and mothers attempt to give birth without an epidural.

On the other end of this spectrum, childbirth is seen as a medical event fraught with potential danger. For many mothers giving birth in such a setting labor begins with an induction between Monday and Friday. Other women, usually asked to come into the hospital early. There, they are monitored and receive IV fluids. and they are often limited to bed and unable to drink or eat. Often the membranes are ruptured, an early epidural is given, and contractions are augmented with pitocin. These mothers have a higher rate of cesarean sections and a higher rate of episiotomies. Many maternity hospitals or obstetrical practices, of course, fall in between these two extremes.”⁶

⁴ The Birth Partner

⁵ The Doula Book

⁶ The Doula Book

“Your doula is your firm anchor in your belief that you can trust your body and that your desires for the birth are important. Hospital protocols are not designed to take your personal desires into account.”⁷

“Doulas may be one of the most effective tools for improving labor, but according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, they are “underutilized.” Only 3 percent to 6 percent of mamas take advantage of this incredible resource.”⁸

“Doctors rely on the nurses to manage the labor, with phone reports as necessary, and they may briefly visit from time to time and will come if problems arise during labor.” And, of course, they are there for the birth. One of the most positive developments in maternity care is the addition of the birth doula, who guides and supports women and their partners continuously through labor and birth.”⁹

Young men, fathers, who often, against their unexpressed wishes, are put in a role of “birthing experts” as the only support of a mother often fail, which leaves both the mother and the father disappointed in the whole experience. Often times labor and delivery are long and exhausting and the mother doesn’t know what to do to ease the pain and lower the stress. “A doula is not scared of your pain. Seeing a loved one in great pain can be torture. Though your partner cannot share your physical pain, witnessing you in anguish may cause great emotional pain.”¹⁰

A doula is a person who, both physically and mentally, supports birthing mother with all the information and practical advice she can offer. A Doula understands and protects unfolding of natural labor and responds to emotional needs of a mother on all stages of labor. A Doula stays with the mother most often through the whole labor and delivery and checks back during

⁷ Natural Hospital Birth

⁸ The Mama Natural

⁹ The Birth Partner

¹⁰ Natural Hospital Birth

postpartum to answer many questions that mother has. Doula takes care of the support person too, enabling that person being involved as much as they are ready for.

“A doula focuses on the mother, even when everyone else is focused on the baby. The actual birth can bring a few minutes of panic if the baby does not breathe right away. A baby who needs help in the first few minutes may be whisked straight from the mother’s body to a crib across the room. The medical professionals are all busy with the baby or the delivery of the placenta. A doula can really help in such terrifying moments. She can bring Mom observations of the baby, such as, "Your baby's eyes are wide open and looking at the ceiling." Or she can remind staff to do their work on the far side of the crib, so the mother's line of vision to the baby is clear.”¹¹

In any case, the doula has to maintain a delicate balance between respecting the protocol of the hospital and professional staff and at the same time keeping the autonomy of the parents uppermost in her mind. In that way she encourages the parents to advocate on their own behalf, especially during the prenatal period.¹²

Overall, the value of birth support of a doula is undoubtedly great. One could say that if every mother had a doula to support her, all the horror stories that some mothers happily share would not take place.

¹¹ Natural Hospital Birth

¹² The Doula Book

Works Cited

Simkin, Penny. *The Birth Partner*

Klaus, Marshall. Kennell, John. Klaus, Phyllis. *The Doula Book*

Howland, Genevieve. *The Mama Natural*

Gabriel, Cynthia. *Natural Hospital Birth*