Best Practice Guidelines: Transfer from Planned Home Birth to Hospital

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> *"We believe that collaboration within an integrated maternity care system is essential for optimal mother-baby outcomes. All women and families planning a home or birth center birth have a right to respectful, safe, and seamless consultation, referral, transport and transfer of care when necessary. When ongoing inter-professional dialogue and cooperation occur, everyone benefits."*[1]

The statement above from the Home Birth Consensus Summit serves as the foundation for the following guidelines on transfer from planned home birth to hospital. These guidelines were developed by a multidisciplinary group of home and hospital based providers and stakeholders who were delegates at the national Home Birth Consensus Summits in 2011 and 2013. These guidelines are informed by the best available evidence on risk reduction and quality improvement and by existing regional policy and practice documents addressing transfer from home to hospital. [2-19]

The purpose of these guidelines is twofold:

1. To highlight core elements to be included when developing documents and policies related to transfer from home to hospital.
2. To promote the highest quality of care for families across birth settings via respectful inter-professional collaboration, ongoing communication, and the provision of compassionate family-centered care.

Collaborative care throughout the antepartum, intrapartum, and postpartum periods is crucial to safety whenever birth is planned outside the hospital setting. Coordination of care and communication of expectations during transfer of care between settings improve health outcomes and consumer satisfaction. [20-34]

State-specific hospital regulations and the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA)[35] established the legal framework for requiring access to hospital care in the United States. The legal recognition of providers of pregnancy and birth care services varies between states. However, each person seeking care at any point during the childbearing cycle has the right to optimal and respectful care regardless of planned birth setting, who the chosen attendants are, or state provider regulations.

These guidelines are appropriate for births planned at home or in a freestanding birth center. Furthermore, we recognize not all providers of home birth or birth center services are midwives. However, we use the term midwife herein because the vast majority of providers of home birth or birth center services identify as midwives.

Model practices for the midwife

- In the prenatal period, the midwife provides information about hospital care and procedures that may be necessary and documents that a plan has been developed with the client/patient for hospital transfer should the need arise. [15]
- The midwife assesses the status of the client/patient, fetus, and newborn throughout the maternity care cycle to determine if a transfer will be necessary.
- The midwife notifies the receiving provider or hospital of the incoming transfer, reason for transfer, brief relevant clinical history, planned mode of transport, and expected time of arrival. [11,13-16,19]
- The midwife continues to provide routine or urgent care en route in coordination with any emergency services personnel and addresses the psychosocial needs of the client/patient during the change of birth setting.
- Upon arrival at the hospital, the midwife provides a verbal report, including details on current health status and need for urgent care. The midwife also provides a legible copy of relevant prenatal and labor medical records. [11,12,15,16,19]
- Community based midwives may continue in a primary role as appropriate to their scope of practice and privileges at the hospital. Otherwise the midwife transfers clinical responsibility to the hospital provider. [13]
- The midwife promotes good communication by ensuring that the client and family understands the hospital provider's plan of care and the hospital provider understands the pregnant person's need for information regarding care options.
- If the client/patient desires continuity of care with a known provider, the community midwife may remain to provide support or care in accordance with the scope and role within institutional guidelines and available staffing.

Model practices for the hospital provider and staff

- Hospital providers and staff are sensitive to the psychosocial needs of the client/patient that result from the change of birth setting. [11]
- Hospital providers and staff communicate directly with the midwife to obtain clinical information in addition to the information provided by the client/family. [12]
- Timely access to hospital services and providers may be best accomplished by direct admission to the labor and delivery or pediatric unit. [11-15]
- Whenever possible, the woman/birther and newborn are kept together during the transfer and after admission to the hospital.
- Hospital providers and staff participate in a shared decision-making process to create an ongoing plan of care that incorporates values, beliefs, and preferences of the patient/client.

- If the woman chooses, hospital personnel will accommodate the presence of the midwife as well as the woman's primary support person during assessments and procedures.
- The hospital provider and the midwife coordinate follow up care for the client/patient and newborn, and care may revert to the midwife upon discharge.
- Relevant medical records, such as a discharge summary, are sent to the referring midwife. [14]
- Opportunities to debrief the case include all providers and the client/patient/family prior to hospital discharge.

Quality improvement and policy development

Coordination and planning for transfers is best accomplished through development of local standardized procedures. All stakeholders involved in the transfer and transport process, including midwives based at home or in the hospital, obstetricians, pediatricians, family medicine physicians, nurses, emergency medical services personnel, and home birth consumer representatives, should participate in the process of developing these standardized procedures. Quality improvement processes should incorporate the model practices above and delineate at a minimum the following:

- Communication channels, and amount and type of information needed to alert the hospital to an incoming transfer.
- Provision for notification and assembly of staff rapidly in case of emergency transfer.
- Documentation of the client/patient's perspective regarding care during transfer.
- A defined process to regularly review transfers that includes all stakeholders with a shared goal of quality improvement and safety. This process should be protected without risk of discovery. [12]
- Opportunities for education regarding home birth practice, shared continuing medical education, and relationship building that are incorporated into medical, midwifery and nursing education programs. Multi-disciplinary sessions to address system issues may enhance relationship building and the work culture.

Quality of care is improved when policies and procedures are in place to govern best practices for coordination and communication during the process of transfer or transport from a home or birth center to a hospital.[2-10]

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