"An extra layer of pressure to be my best self": Healthcare provider perspectives on doula care

Background and purpose

SisterWeb is a community-based organization that provides culturally congruent community doula care at no cost to Black and Latina/o/x families in San Francisco. To create opportunities for bidirectional feedback between doulas and healthcare providers, SisterWeb developed the Champion Dyad Initiative, which fosters the support of one or two staff "champions" at labor and delivery sites. As part of an evaluation of SisterWeb's community doula programs, researchers at UC Berkeley interviewed physicians (n=11), midwives (n=7), and nurses (n=10) who worked at hospitals and clinics where SisterWeb doula clients receive care.

Key takeaways

A majority of participants described positive experiences working with doulas because:

- Doulas make their work easier by providing continuous labor support to clients, allowing participants to focus on clinical tasks and dedicate time to patients with less support.

Few participants described negative interactions with doulas. In these cases:

- They believed a doula had "overstepped the lines of their scope of practice" either by giving medical advice or impeding care by encouraging clients to follow their birth plan when their provider recommended a change in course.

Doulas foster accountability at individual and institutional levels by:

- Increasing participants' personal sense of accountability to patients due to the expectation they were being observed.
- Advocating for hospital staff to call interpreters to facilitate communication, noting that staff often do not call them.

SisterWeb's Champion Dyad Initiative fosters accountability by:

- Facilitating bidirectional feedback between SisterWeb and the hospitals where their clients give birth, creating opportunities for provider- and institutional-level accountability.

Doulas bridge gaps in care for pregnant and birthing people by:

- Establishing relationships with clients prior to childbirth.
- Sharing information about pregnancy and childbirth with clients. In turn, clients come to medical appointments with informed questions.
- Avoiding medical jargon and rephrasing what providers say so the information is more understandable.

Illustration credit: Vecteezy.com

SHARE
SEXUAL HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY PROGRAM

SisterWeb's recommendations for fostering productive interactions between hospital/clinic staff and doulas

✓ Tips for direct communication between doulas and clinical staff

- Look for a private place
- Give the person a "headline" of what you want to communicate
- Make sure all parties give permission to have the conversation or make a date to discuss sometime in the future
- Name the universal goals for the conversation
- Use "I" statements without bringing in other people's opinions
- Ask to hear the other person's perspective and use active listening
- Seek out realistic and concrete solutions
- Give thanks for the effort and the intention

? Example questions to ask in private

- "I'm curious about what just happened in the room. Can you share what your hope is for the patient right now?"
- "I often have many different voices in my head when I'm interacting with a patient. Could you share with me any of the voices in your head regarding where we are at right now?"
- "Can you share with me your perspective on any problems you see right now with our care?"
- "Can you think of one thing we could do together right now to show teamwork and support this patient?"

Ideas for building awareness

- Keep a journal of moments when you feel more or less calm and open to change in dialogue with others in your professional life.
- Practice noticing the somatic/lived experiences in your body during interactions that feel difficult. Narrate them in your head.
- Try practicing a somatic/lived method for grounding BEFORE trying to listen deeply or speak in difficult situations. Examples include breath awareness, tapping, grounding self touch, drinking water or splashing water on your face, and fresh air.
- Reflect afterwards with a peer. Ask yourself: "What is something I learned from that interaction?"

SisterWeb
San Francisco Community Doula Network