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Centering Community: Engaging Social Support to Reduce Maternal Health Disparities

*The Maryland Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Collaborative
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Today's Presenter



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Objectives

1

Understand the importance of building social support as a solution to maternal health disparities

2

Review tools to facilitate communication and engagement of family members and social support systems throughout the birthing process

3

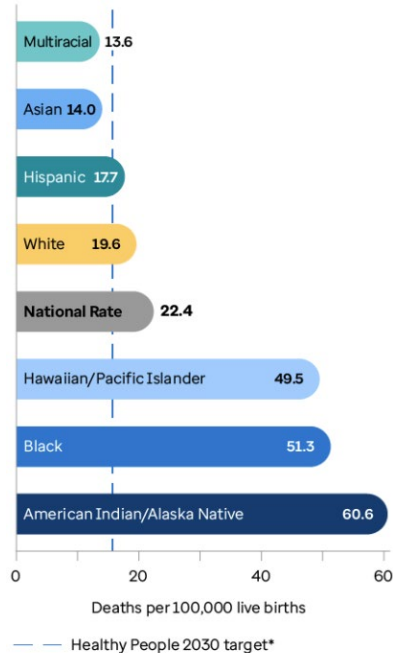
Comprehend methods for engaging with the birthing parents' support team when language and cultural barriers are present

Disparities in Maternal & Child Health

Maternal Mortality

by Race/Ethnicity in 2018-2021

Multiracial and Asian groups have met the Healthy People 2030 target of 15.7 or less.*

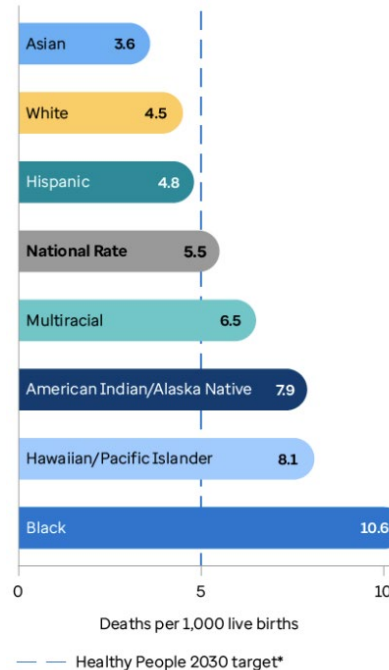


Source: Federally Available Data, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2018-2021.
*Source: Healthy People 2030. "Reduce maternal deaths – MICH-04."

Infant Mortality

by Race/Ethnicity in 2018-2021

Asian, white and Hispanic groups have met the Healthy People 2030 target of 5.0 or less.*



Source: CDC WONDER, Linked Birth/Infant Death Files, 2018-2021.
*Source: Healthy People 2030. "Reduce the rate of infant deaths – MICH-02."

Source: [New America's Health Rankings data brief highlights maternal and infant health disparities](#) | [UnitedHealth Group](#)

Social Support

What is it?

A network of family, friends, neighbors and community members that is available in times of need to give psychological, physical and financial help

Instrumental Support

Tangible aid or services to a person in need

Informational Support

Suggestions and information to address problems

Emotional Support

Empathy and love

Social support is a modifiable social determinant of health

Social Support

The Impact of Disparities

- Racial/ethnic minorities are less likely than White individuals to have a robust social support system
- Low-income households are more likely to report less social support
- The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted social support systems



Sources:

- [Disparities and intersectionality in social support networks: addressing social inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond](#)
- [Humanities and Social Sciences Communications; Loneliness and Social Support Networks: Findings from the KFF Survey of Racism, Discrimination and Health - Findings - 10412 | KFF](#)

Social Support

Within Maternal Health



Provides a buffering mechanism between maternal stress and outcomes such as preterm birth



Predicts fetal growth and is related to higher birth weight



Shorter labor durations and decreased rates of interventions such as cesarean sections



Lack of social support negatively impacts exclusive breastfeeding

Sources:

- [Maternal social support predicts birth weight and fetal growth in human pregnancy – PubMed](#)
- [Social Support and Breastfeeding Outcomes Among a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Population – PubMed](#)
- [Addressing Racial/Ethnic Inequities in Maternal Health Through Community-Based Social Support Services: A Mixed Methods Study](#)
- [Family-Centered Maternity Care: Facilitating Communication and Involvement in the Birthing Process](#)

Social Support

Within Maternal Health



Informational support promotes learning and prepared women for motherhood



Emotional support improved emotional well-being and helped women build lasting, supportive connections



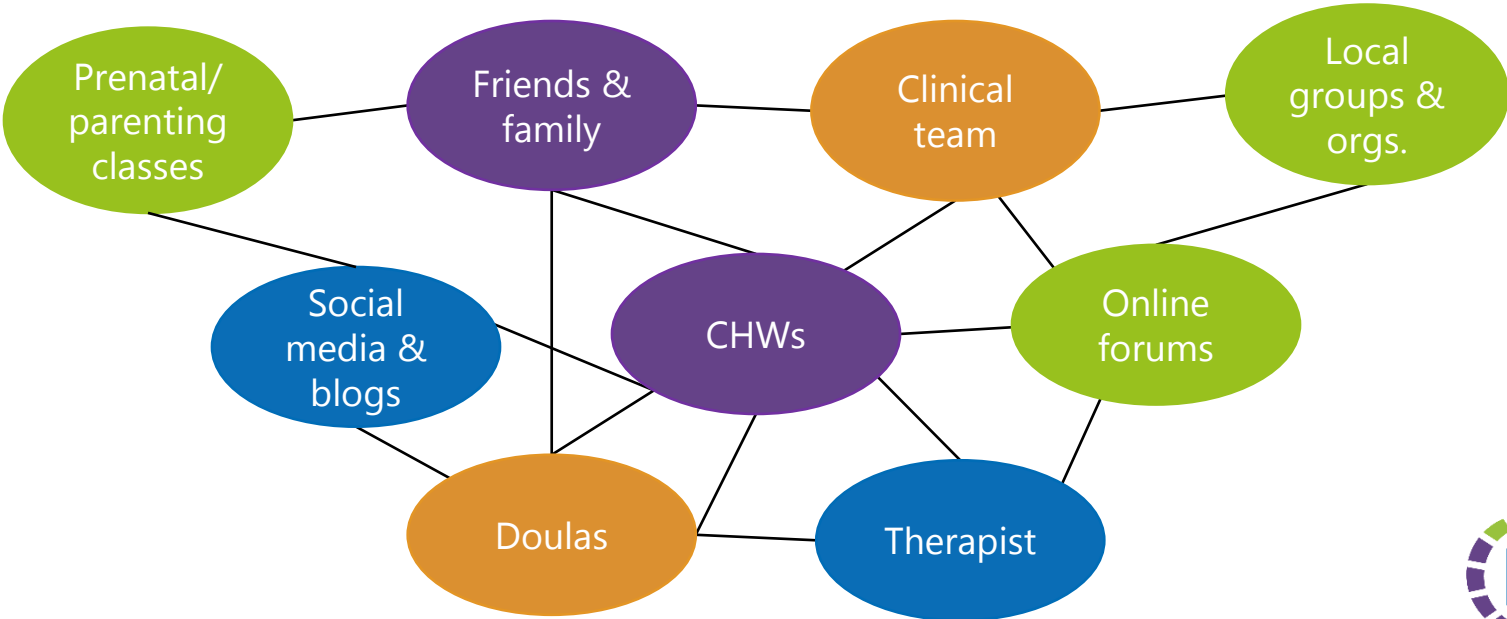
Emotional, informational, and instrumental support worked to create positive relationships between women and health care providers



Social support is considered a critical protective factor for the perinatal period

Social Support

Examples in Maternal Health



Social Support

Strategies for Engaging Social Support

- 1 Assess and identify social support systems
- 2 Establish an equity-informed birth plan
- 3 Facilitate shared-decision making
- 4 Identify and navigate cultural and language barriers
- 5 Integrate doulas into the clinical team

Screening for Social Support

Purpose of Assessment

Assess current level of social support as part of the overall maternal care plan at the first prenatal visit and multiple points thereafter, to:

- Identify and mobilize social support
- Discuss childbirth support plan (e.g., labor support, transportation, doula)
- Discuss postpartum support, emphasizing instrumental support (e.g., meals, household responsibilities infant care, baby supplies)

Screening for Social Support

Select only one option per line:	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to give you good advice about a problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to take you or baby to the doctor if needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone you can laugh or just relax with	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to help you get information or help you to solve a problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to help you with chores or with taking care of the baby	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to share your most private worries and fears with	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to do something enjoyable with	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone to love you and make you feel special	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Can be completed alongside SDOH screening

Can be adapted for prenatal care and visits

Screening for Social Support

Who helps you the most with practical things (feeding baby, folding laundry, grocery store)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Other family members	
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Paid helper	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctor	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse
<input type="checkbox"/> Case manager	<input type="checkbox"/> No one	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____	

With whom do you feel most comfortable sharing your feelings or talking about something that is worrying you?

<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Other family members	
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Paid helper	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctor	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse
<input type="checkbox"/> Case manager	<input type="checkbox"/> No one	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____	

Who helps you the most in with the transition to motherhood?

<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Other family members	
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Paid helper	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctor	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse
<input type="checkbox"/> Case manager	<input type="checkbox"/> No one	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____	

Screening for Social Support

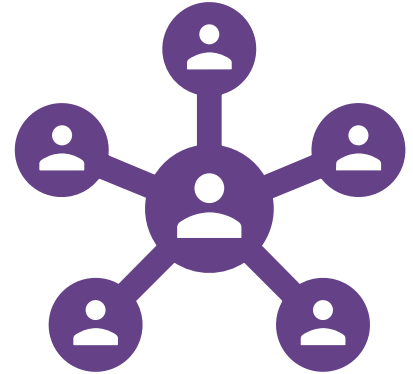
1. Discuss the three areas of social support and inquire about the availability of each within beneficiary's life.
 - Emotional: who will listen to her problems with empathy and understanding?
 - Informational: where will she go for information or advice needed to solve problems that arise?
 - Instrumental: where will she find people that provide functional support like childcare and transportation?
2. Discuss individual and family strengths in preparing for the baby and importance of prenatal attachment.
3. Explore beneficiary's vision for her ideal support system.
4. Discuss positive and negative experiences with past support systems (e.g. people, agencies, organizations groups).
5. Explore opportunities to identify and mobilize social support.
6. Discuss childbirth support plan (i.e. labor support, transportation, community-based doula).
7. Discuss postpartum support, emphasizing instrumental support (e.g. meals, household responsibilities, infant care, baby supplies).
8. Discuss self-care strategies and develop plan to address self-care.
9. Discuss parenting expectations (e.g. household responsibilities, co-parenting, childcare, going back to work).
10. Encourage beneficiary to join a community-based support group (in-person or online).
11. Refer beneficiary to appropriate community mental health, infant mental health service provider or other community resource.

Motivational
interviewing
techniques can be
utilized by case
managers/CHWs

Screening for Social Support

Connecting Patients to Resources

- Patients who screen positive for low social support can be connected to:
 - Culturally-relevant support groups
 - [National resource directory to support maternal health for BIPOC women, mothers and birthing people](#)
 - Online groups/forums
 - Local low-cost or free maternal/parenting classes



Screening for Social Support

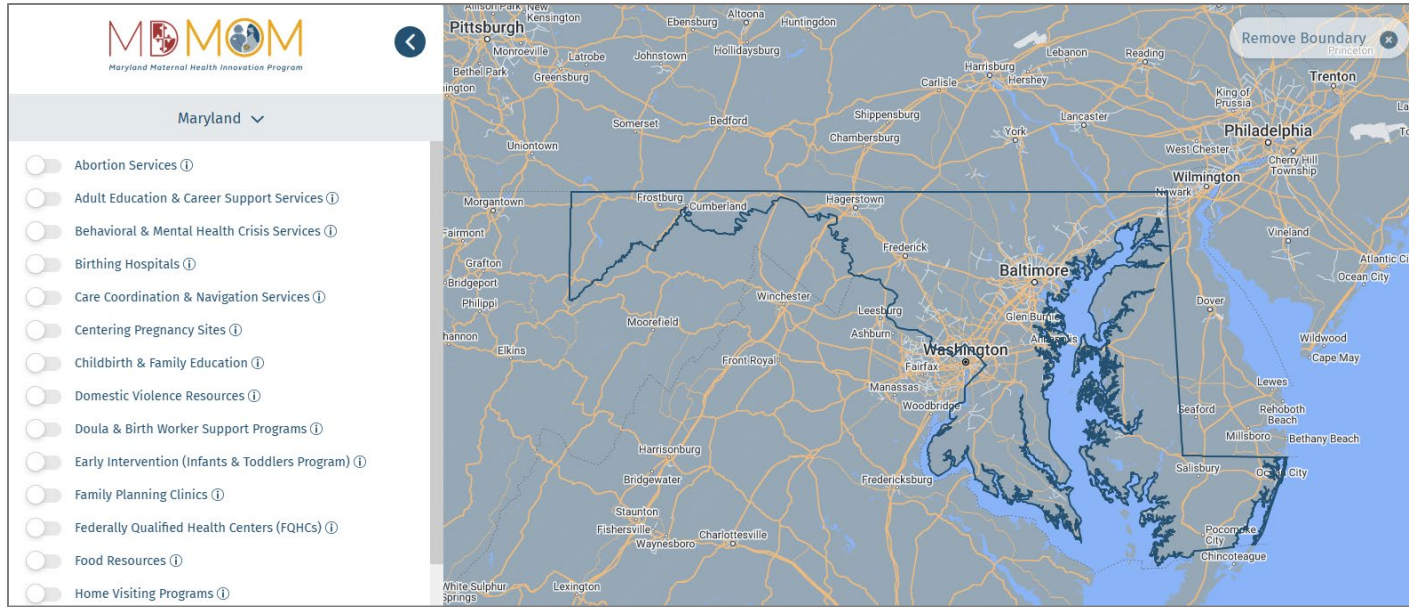
Examples of MD Resources for Patients

- [Counselors Helping South Asians and Indians \(CHAI\) at Pro Bono Counseling](#)
- [Bloom Collective: Baltimore Perinatal Wellness Center for BIPOC Women](#)
- [Cecil County Mom-to-Be Support Group](#)
- [A Father's Place: Prince George's County Support Group](#)
- [Maryland Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorder Support Groups](#)



Screening for Social Support

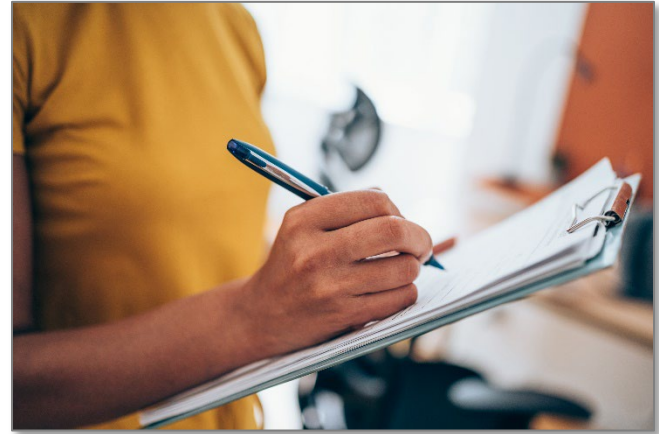
MDMOM Maternal Health Resource Map



Screening for Social Support

Additional Tips for Screening

- Create a structured script for staff
- Start small and scale upwards
- Utilize PDSA cycles to identify ideal workflow
 - When will assessment be conducted?
 - Where will screening take place?
 - How will it be conducted?
 - Who will provide resources for patients and how?



Social Support in the Birth Plan

Importance

- Provides a way for BIPOC birthing parents to communicate their preferences and birthing goals before, during and after labor
- Provides the opportunity to name key factors such as social supports the birthing parent would like present
- Increases patient autonomy



Social Support in the Birth Plan



Traditional:

- Plan for labor
- Induction methods
- Pain management
- Delivery room atmosphere
- Newborn care preferences
- Feeding preferences
- Planning for unexpected



Equity-Informed:

- Presence and role of social support (e.g., doula, family members, partner)
- Addresses fears, concerns and personal goals in a culturally appropriate manner
- Necessity of interpreters

Social Support in the Birth Plan

Equity-Informed Birth Plan Example

FAMILY	Social Support at Home
Goal	Family member or support person knows the importance of my BP, reminds me to keep track of my BP, and will encourage me to seek medical attention if my BP is elevated. I will evaluate home visiting services. Assure that my other child is safe if/ when I have to be hospitalized
Strategy	Pick someone to remind me to take my blood. pressure. Pick someone to know the warning signs of hypertension. Identify support persons for emergencies. Familiarity with warning signs of preeclampsia to help patient see care
COMMUNITY	Adequate Places for Food Sources, Transportation, Pharmacy Access, Work Accommodations
Goal	Find community resources to support me. Seek doula, community health worker care/ information. Look for a primary provider who understands postpartum pregnancy risks.
Strategy	If I need medication(s), can I get it? Identify a pharmacy that is close to my home. Assess transportation and make sure I have an emergency plan. Find resources for healthy eating.

Shared Decision-Making

What is it?

- Collaborative discussions between providers, patients and social supports to discuss best evidence-based practice and **individual's personal beliefs and values**
- Different from informed consent, where clinicians discuss risks, benefits and alternatives



Shared Decision-Making

The SHARE Approach



Shared Decision-Making

Seek Participation

Summarize health problem

Explain all possible options

Invite patient to ask questions and seek understanding

Invite patient and family/social support into discussions

Remind patient that their participation is important



Shared Decision-Making

Example: Seek Participation

- Introduce the topic: “Shall we talk about what options are available for newborn feeding, and which you think may best fit your needs?”
- “You are welcome to ask questions, do you have any initial concerns?”
- “What supports do you have around newborn feeding?” (informational, instrumental, emotional)



Shared Decision-Making

Help Explore and Compare Options

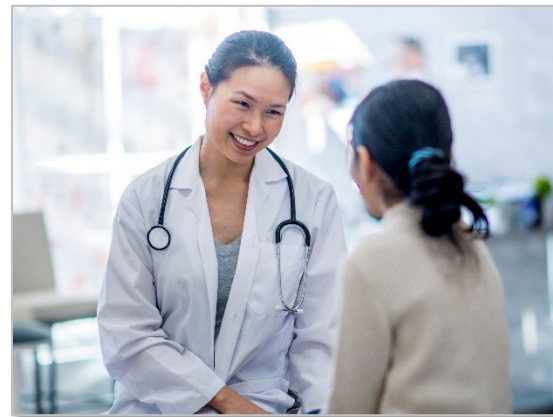
Assess what the patient already knows

Share options in plain language

Clearly communicate risks and benefits of each option

Use simple visual aids (graphs, charts, pictographs)

Use teach-back techniques



Shared Decision-Making

Example: Help Explore and Compare Options

- Explain the risks and benefits of breastfeeding/bottle feeding
- “What do you already know or have seen about breastfeeding/bottle feeding?”
- “What do you perceive will be the benefits and/or challenges?”
- “How do you feel about the decision to breastfeed/bottle feed?”



Shared Decision-Making

Assess Values and Preferences

Encourage patient to talk about what matters most to them

Ask open-ended questions

Listen actively to the patient

Acknowledge the values/preferences that matter most

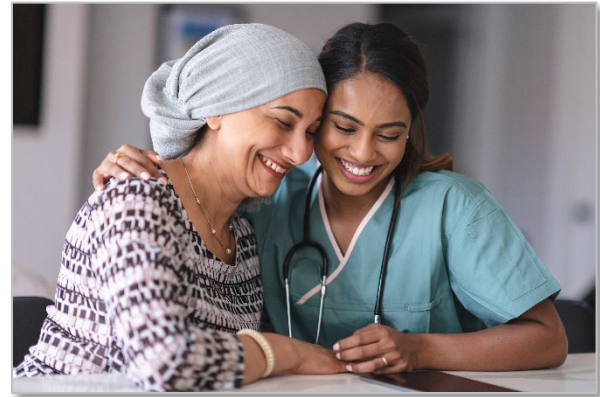
Agree on what is most important to your patient



Shared Decision-Making

Example: Assess Values and Preferences

- “Why is the decision to breastfeed/bottle feed important to you?”
- “When you think about the benefits/risks, what matters most to you?”
- “Who can support you when you face challenges related to feeding?”
- “What do you hope to achieve by breastfeeding/bottle feeding?”



Shared Decision-Making

Reach a Decision

Ask if additional information tools or decision aids are needed

Check to see if the patient needs more time

Listen actively to the patient

Ask if a social support system is needed

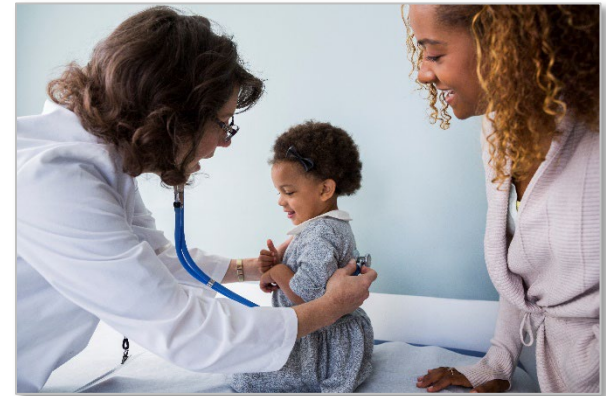
Help the patient move toward a decision and confirm decision



Shared Decision-Making

Example: Reach a Decision

- “Would you like additional information on breastfeeding/bottle feeding?”
- “Would you like to discuss this decision with your family/social support?”
- “What additional questions do you have?”
- “Would you like more time or are you ready to decide?”



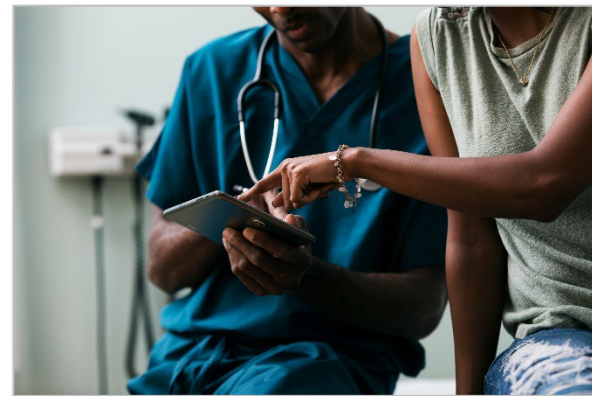
Shared Decision-Making

Evaluate Decision

Monitor the extent to which the decision is implemented

Assist with managing any barriers to implementation

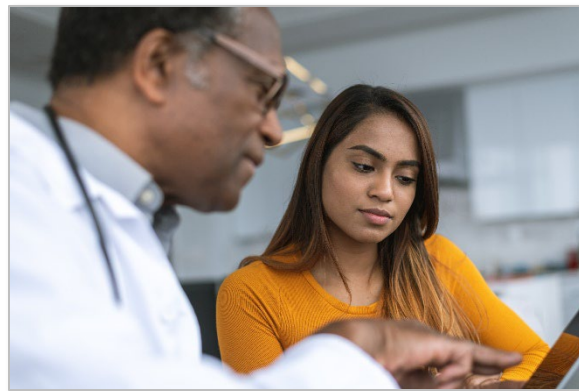
Reevaluate decision and determine if other decisions need to be made



Shared Decision-Making

Example: Evaluate Decision

- “Can we talk about this topic next time to see how things are going?”
- “If things aren’t going well, we can talk about a different approach for you.”



Shared Decision-Making

Strategies for Implementation

- Establish hospital or unit policy with roles and responsibilities clearly defined
- Use the EHR to facilitate communication of patient preferences into routine workflows
- Use decision aids and integrate them into workflows and documentation systems
- Elicit patient preferences and advocate for them in care team discussions and meetings
- Measure and evaluate patient experience with shared decision-making

Shared Decision-Making

Measurement & Evaluation

- Consider the Childbirth Options, Information, and Person-Centered Explanation (CHOICES) tool
 - Captures a patient's experiences of care in prenatal and intrapartum periods
 - Scores can provide insight into implementation and effectiveness of your organization's shared decision-making processes

Item 6: My birth options were written down in my chart or record.

Item 5: I was not able to discuss the different birth options with my provider in detail during pregnancy.

Item 14: During my labor, I had enough time to think over the options/changes I was presented with.

Item 15: There were times during my labor that I received treatments or care that I did not think were needed. AND Item 4: My provider clearly discussed my different birth options with me.

Item 10: The risks and benefits of changes to the plan of care were clearly explained to me in detail.

Item 9: When my provider wanted to change the plan of care, my options were clearly explained to me in.

Item 13: During my labor all procedures were clearly explained to me.

Item 11: During labor with my provider, I felt involved in the decisions about my body and my baby.

Item 12: The nurses in the hospital were aware of my birth options for my labor.

Item 1: There was enough time for questions about my birth options during my prenatal care. AND Item 2: In deciding on my birth options, what I wanted was considered as much as what my provider recommended.

Item 7: When I was in the hospital or birth center, my birth choices were respected by all the physicians and/or midwives who managed my care. AND Item 8: I chose the pain management plan that was best for me during labor.

Item 3: During my pregnancy, my provider and I discussed when I should come to the hospital or birth center when it was time to give birth.

Culture & Language

What is it?

Culturally-appropriate services consider the preferences and aspirations of individuals and the cultures of their communities



Culture & Language

Intervention Strategies

Incorporate interpreters

Incorporate local birthing practices into service provision

Adapt the physical or social setting in which a service is provided (e.g., including family in the room during the birth)

Provide staff training to improve cultural awareness

Use participatory approaches

Culture & Language

Example: Familias Sanas (Healthy Families)

- Implemented at an urban hospital in Phoenix, AZ, to address low-income Latina women's low rate of return for postpartum appointments
- Aimed to bridge the cultural gap and be responsive to Latina beliefs, **including the importance of social support**
- Utilized Prenatal Partners (PPs) who acted as **bicultural and bilingual** patient navigators, encouraged self-advocacy and assisted with communication
- Patients engaged with the PPs were 2.5x more likely to attend their postpartum visits

Recommendations: Interpreter Services

- 1 Whenever possible, ensure continuity of the interpreter to foster a trusted relationship
- 2 Include the interpreter as a member of the multi-disciplinary team
- 3 Train and provide guidelines for maternity and neonatal teams on incorporating interpreters
- 4 Consider training and/or seeking medical interpreters with labor and postpartum doula skills

Integrating Doula Care

The Importance of Doulas

- Doulas play a key role in social support
- Doula care can:
 - Reduce variation in health and social outcomes
 - Support healthcare navigation through education, emotional support and advocacy
 - Educate health care workers on unique cultural birth needs and practices



Integrating Doula Care

Strategies for Incorporation

- 1 Host opportunities to build relationships with doulas
- 2 Develop a doula orientation plan
- 3 Ensure prenatal and postpartum education programs include doulas
- 4 Educate staff and providers
- 5 Inform birthing people and the community

Integrating Doula Care

Host Opportunities to Build Relationships

- Doulas can provide a client introduction letter to share with the OB provider
- Hospitals can host “Meet the Team” events where clinical staff and doulas meet, tour the hospital facility and create a list of local doulas
- Host virtual or in-person webinars and Q&A sessions with doula partners
- Create a “doula badge” (can include headshots and short biography) placed on the unit for reference
- Consider post-delivery care team debriefs with patients and their families

Integrating Doula Care

Develop a Doula Orientation Plan

- Develop a birth unit policy that supports the integration of doulas at the bedside and during procedures
- Develop a clear communication pathway
- Educate doulas on managing emergency obstetric and neonatal scenarios
- Provide a unit tour, pointing out the location of supplies
- Review policies on infection prevention, patient protection and confidentiality



Integrating Doula Care

Ensure Education Programs Include Doulas

- Engage doulas in supporting prenatal and postpartum education programs
 - Doulas are specialized in low-intervention support, which reduces poor outcomes
- Leverage doula certifications to enhance their roles as lactation consultants, community health workers and educators of parenting skills



Integrating Doula Care

Educate Staff and Providers

- Provide information on a doula's role, benefits of doula care, policy and process changes and communication pathways
- Educate the team on low-intervention birth and continuous labor support interventions
- Provide opportunities to gain self-awareness of implicit bias
- Collect continuous feedback



Integrating Doula Care

Inform Birthing People and the Community

- Develop informational tools to explain how doulas are integrated into the birth team
- Share best communication pathways for the patient and family
- Discuss when and why medical intervention may be escalated
- Ensure patients are aware of the doula policy



Engaging Social Support in Maternal Care

Summary

- 1 Assess and identify social support systems
- 2 Establish an equity informed birth plan
- 3 Facilitate shared-decision making
- 4 Identify and navigate cultural and language barriers
- 5 Integrate doulas into the clinical team



Contact Information

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Resources

- [Postpartum Social Support Screening Tool](#)
- [MDHHS Social Support Screening Tool](#)
- [Maternal and Mental Health Resources for BIPOC Women, Mothers, and Birthing People – Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance: MMHLA](#)
- [Addressing Racial Disparities in Maternal Health: The Case for an Equity Birth Plan](#)
- [Integrating Community Doulas into the Health Care Team](#)

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