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What is a Doula?

The *doula* is an old concept of a support person for a woman in labor. The word *doula* is ancient Greek for "woman care giver" - this was usually the most favored female servant in the ancient Greek household and the servant most likely to accompany the lady of the house during birth.

Today, doulas are women experienced in childbirth, who provide continuous physical, emotional and informational support to women. Dr. Marshall Klaus author of *Mothering the Mother: How a Doula Can Help You Have a Shorter Easier and Healthier Birth*, Klaus, Kennell, and Klaus (1993) describes the combined results of eleven randomized trials, comparing groups of women who had a doula with groups who did not.

- a 50% reduction in the cesarean section rate
- a 25% reduction in length of labor
- a 40% reduction in the use of oxytocin
- a 30% reduction in the use of analgesics
- a 40% reduction in the use of forceps
- a 60% reduction in the request for epidural anesthesia

What do doulas do that produce such amazing results?

Many doulas are hired by clients early in their pregnancy, about the 5th or 6th month, but sometimes it the clients learns later in pregnancy and hires a doula days before labor begins. They begin building a trusting relationship with the client and discuss birthing options and reinforce many concepts learned in childbirth class. The doula is also the familiar face in a sea of strangers when the clients are in labor and go to the hospital. There is closeness and a trusting relationship that builds.

Doulas also are trained in *nonpharmacological* methods of pain relief and have an understanding in the natural processes of labor and labor enhancement. They are skilled at massage, breathing techniques, relaxation, acupressure, hydrotherapy, aromatherapy, upright positioning, counter pressure and relaxation techniques. They generally meet with you prior to your birth, are present during birth, and offer follow up visits as well.

Their most valuable tools are their hands and their loving patience. A doula does not speak for her client(s) but empowers the client to make informed decisions about labor and birth. A doula does not work against the better health wisdom for her client nor does she encourage or participate in creating a confrontational environment, either prenatally or during labor/birth. A doula does NO clinical tasks such as vaginal exams, monitoring/interpreting fetal heart rates or recommending certain modes of treatment. Doulas do not deliver babies.

Will The Doula Take The Place Of The Partner or Husband?

The doula can actually bring the couple closer. By making sure that the partner's needs are met (food, drink, occasional back rubs, and reassurance), the woman and partner can work more closely together. The doula allows for the partner to participate at his own comfort level. Some husbands prefer to be there only to witness the birth of their child and to share this experience with the woman they love. They may not want to play an active role and do not want to be responsible for the woman's comfort and emotional security. The doula can fill in and allow the partner to participate as he wishes, without leaving the woman's needs unmet. When the husband chooses to be the major source of emotional support, the doula can supplement his or her efforts by running errands, making suggestions for comfort measures, and offering words of reassurance and comfort. During a long tiring labor, she can give the husband a break for a brief rest or change of scene. While the doula probably knows more than the husband about birth, hospitals, and maternity care, the husband knows more about the woman's personality.

Do Women Who Choose Epidural Anesthesia Still Benefit From Doula Service?

There is a myth that doulas only provide care for those interested in natural childbirth/unmedicated births. Far from the truth! Doulas provide care for women with and without medication, women who have vaginal births, unaccompanied teen mothers, women who have disabilities, women who plan cesarean sections, women who have unplanned cesarean sections or women who are planning a TOLAC (trial of labor after cesarean) or VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean). Since the core of the doula's belief is to make this the very best birth experience for a woman, the doula can be a benefit regardless of the special circumstances surrounding a birth.

How Much Do The Services Of The Doula Cost?

The cost of doula varies with geography and with the extended expertise of the doula. Extended expertise of doulas may include training as a certified lactation consultant, childbirth educator, nurse, or perinatal exercise specialist. Doulas who have been practicing for many years and have extensive experience may charge more. Ranges in the Central Florida area are \$400-\$800.

What Kind Of Training Do Doulas Receive?

Just as each educational institution in the U.S. varies, so does the training differ between organizations and even between the trainers in each organization. General pre-requisites include reading a certain number of books, attending childbirth classes (she may even be a certified childbirth educator) and having a heart for women and birth, attending a lengthy workshop, acting as a doula for a certain number of births as a trainee, and making a formal application to the organization either in an essay or exam format.

There are some basic questions you may want to ask when interviewing your doula. These questions may include:

- Are you trained and certified? If so, by whom and for how long? How many births have you attended as a doula?
- What other training or experience in childbirth have you had?
- How much does your doula care cost and what is included in the cost?
- Have you ever attended a birth at my hospital with my doctor?
- What if I go into labor prematurely, will you be there for me?
- How do you see my husband's role in the birth?
- What types of things can you suggest to me for back labor?
- How do you feel about medications during labor and birth?
- How can I get a hold of you?
- How do you feel about birth?

Contact Kathy Bradley at 321-213-1112 or Kathy@childbirthconcierge to schedule your complimentary Skype session to get your questions answered.

<http://www.childbirthconcierge.com>

***Kathy Bradley, CD, ICCE, IBCLC** has been involved with perinatal education and health care since 1989. As the founder and executive director of the former Childbirth Enhancement Foundation, she developed partnerships and training programs for community based doula programs with 14 hospitals. She is owner of Childbirth Concierge and holds a degree in Communication and Public Relations. As an Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultant, Childbirth Educator, Certified Doula, and she serves on the Council of Licensed Midwifery for Florida Department of Health. During her career Kathy has made numerous appearances on TV programs focused on women and children's health as well as developed many training programs for para professionals and health professionals. She worked with mom and babies at Winnie Palmer Hospital in Orlando, FL for 14 years and has been in private practice since 1991.*