The Most Effective Nurse

NURSE IMPACT

Characterizing Labor & Delivery Nurses Most Effective at Supporting Physiologic Birth for Low-Risk Birthing Persons

Labor and delivery nurses are members of the largest and most trusted group of healthcare providers in the United States. They attend all of the near four million hospital-based births each year, providing much of the direct patient care during the intrapartum period. In fact, they spend more time at the bedside than any other clinician on the team.

Although accountability for intrapartum outcomes is shared, birthing persons, physicians, and nurses themselves perceive that nursing care impacts the chance of a vaginal delivery, particularly among people at low obstetric risk. Clinical observations on labor and delivery units indicate that certain nurses consistently have low intervention rates, low cesarean rates, and optimal birth outcomes, irrespective of obstetric risk level or the physician or midwife involved. **The intent of this brief is to describe the characteristics and best practices consistently evident among nurses perceived to be most effective in supporting physiologic birth ("the most effective nurse").**

Roles to Achieve Goals

The goals of nursing practice are to promote safe outcomes, empower and inform families, support positive birth experiences, and maintain effective communication with the care team. *"The most effective nurse"* achieves these goals by fulfilling the following roles, based on surveys and focus groups with over 300 L&D nurses:

Guardian
"Facilitate safe care for mom and baby"

Supporter
"Provide continuous emotional and physical support"

Care Manager
"Perform regular assessments"
"Monitor baby's heart rate and effect of labor"
"Provide pain relief measures"

Experience Shaper
"Work with birthing persons to have the experience they desire"

Educator
"Explain what is happening"
"Help set realistic expectations"

Advocate
"Advocate for mom and her birth plan with the care team"

Defining the Most Effective Nurse

The most effective nurse can be defined by their knowledge, attitudes, attributes, and practices within the context of the clinical environment.

Knowledge

The most effective nurses are clinical experts. They possess knowledge of physiologic processes and understand the purpose and physiological impact of their clinical practices. Effective nurses apply their knowledge to create individualized, patient-centered plans of care that are evidence-based. This knowledge includes identifying and facilitating labor onset, stages of labor, and labor progress, as well as knowledge about the spectrum of comfort measures, labor positions, and physiologic pushing methods to employ in partnership with their patients.

Effective nurses also assess and promote fetal well-being in labor and provide immediate postpartum dyad care. In addition, effective nurses have knowledge about dynamic communication skills critical to connecting the patient and the care team. They also have practical knowledge specific to their organization, including the day-to-day unit procedures, internal processes, and culture, as well as the communication and working styles of care team members.

Attitudes

The most effective nurses view childbirth as a natural, physiologic process and trust the birthing process. They perceive labor pain as a normal symptom of labor progress. They value the birthing person's preferences and perceive that intervention should only be employed when necessary, as indicated by the birthing person's condition and preferences.

Attributes

The most effective nurses are competent, confident, creative, courageous, trustworthy, positive, and compassionate. They possess a calm demeanor and a non-judgmental approach that facilitates trust among birthing persons, families, and care team members.

Practices

Key practices of effective nurses include sustained presence at the bedside and hands-on, high-touch supportive care. They proactively manage care by assisting in frequent and varied labor position changes, based on regular assessments of maternal-fetal status. Effective nurses recommend non-pharmacologic pain relief options and provide ongoing, patient-centered feedback about labor progress and changes.

Effective nurses further balance transparent bedside communication with professional, clinical communication to the full care team. They courageously advocate for the birthing person's preferences to ensure that the team follows a patient-centered plan driven by the birthing person's goals. Effective nurses also efficiently and accurately integrate patient information into electronic documentation in accordance with professional and legal standards.

Support for Nurses

While a complete description of an enabling practice environment is beyond the scope of this brief, it is essential that nurses are supported by adequate staffing, resources and equipment, functioning care teams, effective management, and a workplace culture that is committed to promoting physiologic birth.

Want to learn more? Contact the Nurse Impact team at info@ariadnelabs.org for more information.

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