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Labor and delivery care have come a long way

BY DR. ANAYDA DEJESUS-CRUZ
STURDY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Sturdy Memorial Hospital has been welcoming babies into the world for more than a century.

The hospital's first maternity unit, opened in 1913, was a small room in the basement of the original house that served as the hospital. There was very little privacy and the doctor who delivered was a general practitioner.

The birthing process has undergone continuous changes since then. Labor and delivery have become less daunting and more personalized, comforting experiences for both mom and baby.

Some of the major changes that have occurred include the ability for the father or significant other to be in the delivery room, length of stay in the hospi-

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Expectant fathers were formerly confined to the lonely, nerve-racking chairs in the waiting room or stayed at home until they were called. Now, they are permitted, and more importantly, encouraged to be by their partner's

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during the entire labor and delivery process.

This closeness reinforces the bond as partners and as parents. Skin-to-skin contact, another practice that is now widely adopted, encourages the new mother to place her baby onto her chest right after delivery. It helps the baby adjust to life outside of the womb.

In addition, during this transformation to patient-centered maternity care, the amount of time that new mothers need to remain in the hospital has gradually declined from seven days to about 48 hours. This considers multiple factors such as vaginal birth vs. Cesarean sec-

tion (C-section), and complications or prior medical conditions. If the baby is delivered via C-section, it is normal to stay up to four days, providing the extra time needed to recover from surgery.

The entire experience from admission, labor and delivery, to discharge home is now geared towards comfort. In earlier times, new moms would be highly medicated or sedated and immediately separated from their newborns. It is now widely accepted, and practiced at Sturdy, to offer a more natural, gentle birthing experience and allow pain medication to be tailored to one's wants and needs.

Furthermore, once ad-

mitted there are no room changes; during labor and after delivery, mom and baby stay together, in one room, known as a "birthing room." Women requiring a C-section return to their rooms after leaving the operating room, which is located right on the maternity unit. Of course, the nursery, staffed by maternity nurses and neonatal nurse practitioners, is still available.

Parents-to-be can work with their obstetrician and maternity care team to determine their birth plans, desired outcomes, pain management options and breastfeeding choices. Ages ago, there were few options. Giving birth today is an exciting, life-chang-

ing experience where women fully participate in their birth experiences.

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