

Volunteer Doula Program and the Benefits It Provides

Sentara Princess Anne Hospital

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Background

Doula care has resulted in overall healthier birth outcomes by providing non-medical support to a laboring family. Doulas remind partners about comfort measures, encourage families to ask questions and to assess alternative options when appropriate.

Continuous labor support can:

- Decrease pain
- Shorten labor
- Increase breastfeeding success
- Reduce the need for routine medical interventions and cesarean birth
- Support the entire family through their birth journey



Problem

Prior to the development of the Volunteer Doula Program at Sentara Princess Anne Hospital, the only option for expectant mothers was to hire a doula at an additional cost.

Statement

Many families did not know that doula care existed, or were deterred by common misconceptions such as: doulas serve only un-medicated laboring women or that doulas replace partners and family as the primary labor support. This knowledge deficit was observed during tours and childbirth classes. Additionally, the cost to hire a doula ranges between \$300 to \$1500 depending on locality and on doula experience.

Methods

Knowledge deficits are reduced by defining the doula role and by promoting the benefits of doula care within the hospital's childbirth education and tour program.

Question and answer sessions are provided to clear up common misconceptions surrounding doula care. Sentara Princess Anne Hospital is the only hospital within the Sentara system that operates a volunteer doula program.

Prospective volunteers are screened and vetted through the traditional route for all hospital volunteers and then are referred to the Volunteer Doula Coordinator. Volunteers are then provided with opportunities to shadow with an experienced doula, and are required to attend a six week childbirth education course at the hospital. Once competence and confidence are achieved, shadowing doulas advance to the role of independent doula and serve, at a minimum, twice a month for a six hour shift. Laboring women and their families are offered doula support once they are admitted to Labor and Delivery.



Results

- Women and their families are now requesting doula care when admitted, and some are even placing the request in their birth plan.
- The interest in volunteering for the program has increased.
- Our volunteers are a diverse group of women with varied backgrounds that add to the patient experience.
- A surprise result has been the influx of requests to volunteer from student nurses. Their experience with this non-medical bedside care builds their repertoire of patient comfort care skills and advocacy, as they transition into their future nursing career.



Conclusions

- Doula care for patients has been well received and requests for care are often patient initiated.
- Staff has expressed satisfaction and appreciation for the extra set of hands in the labor room.
- The Volunteer Doula Program continues to recruit and train volunteer doulas.
- Further research on patient outcomes related to the presence of the volunteer birth doula is needed.

Acknowledgements

The Volunteer Doula Program was implemented successfully due to the support of the Sentara Princess Anne Hospital Volunteer Services, Healing Therapies, and the Family Maternity Center labor and delivery nurses and physicians.