Safety First

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ABSTRACT

In this humor column, a childbirth educator describes an incident involving the installation of what probably was not a safety seat at all.

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On a recent, beautiful spring day, I waited just outside the entrance of a community hospital. The breeze carried the smell of lilacs as well as wee bits of what appeared to be wrapping paper. It was then that I spotted two nurses stuffed into both the back and front seats of a very small and very dilapidated car. They were doing their best to correctly install an infant car seat. Cardboard and various other pieces of factory packaging, along with sheets of directions and warnings printed in 17 languages, were piled just outside the vehicle. Perched on the curb next to the rubbish was a disheveled-looking fellow arguing with a woman who was sitting in a wheelchair and holding a newborn. Between barbs and profanities directed at one another, both expressed impatience bordering on anger with the nurses.

Straining, I watched one of the nurses literally hoist the back seat above her head. The other held it from falling back into place and watched her colleague delve blindly into the seat's underbelly in a search for safety belts. Emerging victorious, the nurses brushed away fossilized French fries (probably purchased back when McDonald's had sold fewer than 1 million burgers) and proceeded to rethread the restraints.

The baby was safely belted in the seat and seemed calm as the parents climbed into the car. Just then, a loud boom resonated, and I turned to see the passenger's-side seat-back give way and crash onto the infant seat, thankfully not injuring the baby. More swearing ensued as the parents accused the nurses of "breaking" the car!

Focused on making sure the baby was unharmed, the two nurses looked aghast. I wish I could tell you what followed, but my ride to the airport arrived.

As I stepped into the taxi, I noticed a Styrofoam coffee cup rolling about on the floor. On the side of the cup was a clear warning label: "Caution: Hot beverages are hot!" Posted on the cab's window partition were a number of other safety recommendations and warning labels.

There can't be a perinatal practitioner out there who hasn't asked herself why parents take classes to birth a baby but aren't required to pass any test whatsoever to procreate! Think of the warning labels we'd like to affix to the foreheads of some of our clients. Enough said.

After arriving at the airport, I continued thinking of the nurses, the infant, and the car held together with spit and rubber bands, when my attention was caught by one of the terminal's televisions. A deep, fear-evoking voice asked, "Is your child's safety seat toxic?"

I would have to wait until 11:00 p.m. to find out on the evening news. Given the day's events, I could only shake my head and appreciate the irony.

DEB GAULDIN is a childbirth educator who travels nationally presenting keynotes and workshops. Her CDs and tapes contain humor and songs about pregnancy, childbirth, and the adjustment to parenthood. For booking information or to purchase Deb's recordings, call 800-682-2347 or visit her Web site (www.debgauldin.com).