Welcoming Transparency

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ABSTRACT

In this column, the editor of *The Journal of Perinatal Education* (JPE) discusses why there is a need for transparency to improve maternity care. The editor also describes the contents of this JPE issue, which offer a broad range of resources, research, and inspiration for childbirth educators in their efforts to promote normal birth.

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While reading my local newspaper on the train en route to work recently, a short article, titled “Doctors’ Orders: Don’t Rate Us,” caught my eye, even though it was tucked away on page 10. The article was written by Associated Press medical writer Lindsey Tanner (2009), and included an anonymous comment posted on the Web site RateMDs.com that described a doctor as “very unhelpful, arrogant” (para. 1). The comment went on to say that the doctor “[did] not listen and cut me off, seemed much too happy to have power (and abuse it!)” (para. 1).

Web sites that allow the public to rate products and services provided are becoming much more common. A popular online site where students can candidly rate their professors has been around for a number of years, and, in addition to online book reviews and restaurant rating systems, almost every online purchase invites buyers to rate the product and their satisfaction with the service provided. There is a growing expectation for transparency so that consumers are aware of what they are purchasing and can make informed decisions.

As I continued to read Tanner’s (2009) article, I was somewhat shocked to learn that some doctors are fighting against RateMDs.com and other such

sites. In fact, some members of the medical community are going so far as to ask patients to agree to what Tanner described as a “gag order” that bars patients from posting negative comments online. For example, Tanner reports, Dr. Jeffrey Segal, a neurosurgeon, has developed a company that helps doctors monitor and prevent online criticism:

“Consumers and patients are hungry for good information” about doctors, but Internet reviews provide just the opposite, contends Dr. Jeffrey Segal. . . . Some sites “are little more than tabloid journalism without much interest in constructively improving practices,” and [consumers’ and patients’] comments can unfairly ruin a doctor’s reputation, Segal said. . . . His company, Medical Justice, . . . provides doctors [for a fee] with a standardized waiver agreement. Patients who sign [the waiver] agree not to post online comments about the doctor, “his expertise and/or treatment.” . . . Segal’s company advises doctors to have all patients sign the agreements. (para. 3, 4, 6, and 8)

Wendy C. Budin
Editor

We invite readers to respond to the contents of this issue or share comments on other topics related to promoting normal birth. Responses will be published as a letter to the editor. Please send comments to Wendy Budin, Editor-in-Chief (wendy.budin@nyu.edu).

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The Transparency in Maternity Care Project is dedicated to ensuring public access to quality-of-care information specifically related to maternity care providers and institutions. The project's intention is to extend the current social trend toward transparency in health care into the virtually overlooked maternity care arena. For more information, visit the project's Web site (<http://www.thebirthsurvey.com/index.html>).

Elan McAllister's guest editorial, "Transparency in Maternity Care: Empowering Women to Make Educated Choices," is available for free download on The Journal of Perinatal Education's (JPE's) online site (www.ingentaconnect.com/content/lamaze/jpe). The content of all JPE issues published since October 1998 is also available on this site. Lamaze International members can access the site and download free copies of JPE articles by logging on at the "Members Only" link on the Lamaze Web site (www.lamaze.org).

But will physicians who block individuals from sharing their experiences and feelings about their encounters with health-care providers contribute to improving the health-care system? We need to transform our health-care system so people know what they are paying for, so they know whether or not they are getting good quality health care, and so they have a reason and an ability to care.

Transparency and better public information on quality health care are essential to help patients make informed choices about their care (e.g., see McAllister, 2008). The day is coming when useful rating systems for health care, accessible by the Internet, will be the norm. There is no doubt that patients want good information. But many question whether the current crop of physician-rating systems passes the test. Perhaps it is up to educated consumers to decide. Your opinions on this topic are welcomed.

IN THIS ISSUE

In continuing *The Journal of Perinatal Education's* mission to promote normal birth, this issue's "Celebrate Birth!" column features not one but two birth stories: one from a new mother, and one from a new father. Jordan and Brian Amis each share a unique point of view of the birth of their son, Charlie. Brian and Jordan are the son and daughter-in-law of Debby Amis, who also contributed a stimulating column for this issue of the journal.

In her guest editorial, "Pressure from Above," Debby Amis describes the new perinatal standards endorsed by the National Quality Forum and goals to improve the health of all Americans announced by the National Priorities Partnership. She discusses the impact of the standards and goals on maternity care and what the childbirth educator can do to help implement the standards and advance the goals.

Two articles in this issue examine different aspects of breastfeeding. In a thought-provoking article titled "A Double-Edged Sword: Lactation Consultants' Perceptions of the Impact of Breast Pumps

on the Practice of Breastfeeding," Kathleen Buckley presents the findings of her qualitative descriptive study that examined the beliefs and experiences of 12 lactation consultants regarding the impact of breast pumps on breastfeeding practices. Interview topics on breast pumps included types and patterns of use, mothers' experiences, and advantages and risks. The lactation consultants reported an increase in the use of breast pumps due to improved marketing, a change in society's view of pumps as a necessity rather than a luxury, and the impact of birthing technology.

In "A History of Infant Feeding," Emily Stevens, Thelma Patrick, and Rita Pickler provide a literature review that traces the historical evolution of infant feeding from the use of wet nursing to the use of the feeding bottle, and the proliferation of breast-milk substitutes or infant formula use. They critically explore factors associated with infant-feeding trends leading to the rise of bottle-feeding and the rapid decline of breastfeeding. The literature on key issues pertaining to child health and the development of common health problems among breastfed versus formula-fed infants is briefly reviewed.

According to Cheryl Zauderer, author of "Postpartum Depression: How Childbirth Educators Can Help Break the Silence," the voices of women suffering from postpartum depression are often silent. Women are reluctant to reveal to others that they are unhappy after the birth of their babies. Much has been written on possible causes, risk factors, and treatments for postpartum depression, but little has been done to investigate why women take so long to seek help. Zauderer discusses how early detection and treatment are key to a full recovery and suggests that childbirth educators are in the position to offer anticipatory guidance on possible complications of the postpartum period, including postpartum depression. Zauderer's article explores why women with postpartum depression often choose to suffer in silence and suggests how childbirth educators can help new mothers find their voices.

Anne Broussard and Brenda Broussard describe an innovative project in their article, "Designing and Implementing a Parenting Resource Center for Pregnant Teens." The Resource Center for Young Parents-To-Be is a longstanding and successful grant-funded project that was initiated as a response to an identified community need. Senior-level baccalaureate nursing students and their maternity-nursing instructors are responsible for staffing the

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resource center's weekly sessions, which take place at a public school site for pregnant adolescents. The authors describe how childbirth educators interested in working with this population can assist in replicating this exemplary clinical project in order to provide prenatal education to this vulnerable and hard-to-reach group.

In this issue's "Tools for Teaching" column, Madeline Oden—who is Executive Chairperson of The Tatia Oden French Memorial Foundation, Chairperson of the Maternal, Child Health subcommittee of the Alameda County Public Health Commission in California, and a certified doula — cautions readers about the off-label use of Cytotec (misoprostol) to induce labor, which has increased over the past few decades. Oden's column serves as a teaching tool for childbirth educators and provides an example of two unnecessary and potentially avoidable deaths that allegedly occurred due to the medicalization of birth.

Regular readers of *The Journal of Perinatal Education* may notice that, in this issue, we do not have a "Research Summaries for Normal Birth" column provided by Amy Romano. Stay tuned for more information about a new Lamaze International blog coordinated by Romano (www.scienceandsensibility.org), as well as a new and improved format for the "Research Summaries" column in our next issue.

In this issue's "Media Reviews" column, coordinated by Teri Shilling, reviewers offer perspectives and comments on a variety of current media resources that address pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding. The books, CDs, DVDs, and kits reviewed in this issue's column include the following titles: *Survivor Moms: Women's Stories of Birthing, Mothering and Healing after Sexual Abuse*, by Mickey Sperlich and Julia S. Seng; *Trainer's Warehouse Book of Games: Fun and Energizing Ways to Enhance Learning*, edited by Elaine Biech; *The Milk Memos: How Real Moms Learned to Mix Business with Babies –*

And How You Can, Too, by Cate Colburn-Smith and Andrea Serrette; *The Business Case for Breastfeeding – Steps for Creating a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite: Bottom Line Benefits [Kit]*, by Every Mother, Inc., and Rich Winter Design and Multimedia; *The Pregnant Guy: Journey to the Center of the Birth*, by Simon Morse; *Even June Cleaver Would Forget the Juice Box*, by Ann Dunnewold; *A Dozen Invisible Pieces and Other Confessions of Motherhood*, by Kimmelin Hull; *Complete Childbirth Class: PowerPoint Presentation*, produced by InJoy Birth and Parenting Videos; *The Stages of Labor 2nd Edition – A PowerPoint Guide*, produced by InJoy Birth and Parenting Videos; *Planned Cesarean: Your Guide to a Positive Birth Experience*, produced by InJoy Birth and Parenting Videos; *Bedrest Fitness*, produced by Darline Turner-Lee / Next Step Fitness, Inc.; *Labor Simulator: Bringing Childbirth Theory to Life*, produced by Liz Chalmers / Birth Zone, LLC; and *Birthing the Future's International Symposium #1 and Symposium #2 –The Roots of Love & Violence: Birth and the Primal Period*, edited by Suzanne Arms and Alex Oliszewski and produced by Suzanne Arms Presents and Birthing the Future.

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