Healthy Birth Practices Revisited

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ABSTRACT

In this column, the editor of *The Journal of Perinatal Education* describes this special issue where distinguished authors provide updated evidence-based reviews of the Lamaze International Six Healthy Birth Practices that promote, support, and protect natural, safe, and healthy birth.

This issue is dedicated to Elisabeth Bing on the occasion of her 100th birthday.

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Editor

As the saying goes, “you’ve come a long way, baby . . .” But have we? Since the early 1960s, when Elisabeth Bing and Marjorie Karmel first founded the American Society for Psychoprophylaxis in Obstetrics (ASPO), the organization that would eventually become Lamaze International, we have seen a lot of changes in maternity care. As Judith Lothian so eloquently describes in this issue’s feature article, which traces some of the historical events and major publications that have had an impact on promoting optimal care in childbirth, back in “. . . those early days, knowing what to expect, basic breathing and relaxation skills, support, and avoiding the dreaded ‘twilight sleep’ was the recipe for having a ‘natural’ birth. And it worked.” So what happened? How has medicalization of birth changed everything, and why is there currently a push by several influential organizations to support care practices that promote, support, and protect natural, safe, and healthy birth? A growing body of research continues to provide evidence for the benefits of supporting the normal physiologic process of labor and birth and the risks of interfering with this natural process. This special issue of *The Journal of Perinatal Education* (JPE), dedicated to Elisabeth

Bing on the occasion of her 100th birthday, provides evidence-based updates for professionals to support these Healthy Birth Practices.

IN THIS ISSUE

In addition to the updates on the Healthy Birth Practices, we are pleased to continue the practice of advancing the Lamaze mission to promote, support, and protect natural, safe, and healthy birth by sharing inspiring birth stories. In this issue’s “Celebrate Birth!” column, Mariam Noel Murgio, a long-time childbirth educator who attended the hospital birth of her granddaughter Cora, discusses how her daughter Robyn’s instincts and confidence helped to overcome institutional issues to provide a good and safe birthing experience.

As previously mentioned, this special issue of the journal is dedicated to Elisabeth in honor of her 100th birthday. Elisabeth’s life is an inspiration to all who continue her mission of birth and women’s advocacy. In her special dedication article, “Elisabeth Bing Is a Treasure: Personal Reflections on a Life in Birth,” Mary Jo Podgurski strives to capture the indomitable spirit of the founder of ASPO/Lamaze

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

The content of all JPE issues published since October 1998 is available on the journal’s website (www.ingentaconnect.com/content/springer/jpe). 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 website (www.lamaze.org).

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(now Lamaze International) through a personal reflection.

In this issue's featured article, Judith Lothian reviews the current state of U.S. maternity care and discusses research and advocacy efforts that address this issue. This article describes optimal care in childbirth and introduces the Lamaze Six Healthy Birth Practices.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #1: Let Labor Begin on Its Own," Debby Amis provides an updated evidence-based review of the "Lamaze International Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #1: Let Labor Begin on Its Own" published in JPE, 16(3), 2007. In this article, she discusses how the evidence for letting labor begin on its own supports normal physiology, prevents iatrogenic prematurity, and prevents the cascade of interventions caused by labor induction.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #2: Walk, Move Around, and Change Positions Throughout Labor," Michele Ondeck provides an updated evidence-based review of the "Lamaze International, Inc. Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #2: Freedom of Movement Throughout Labor" published in 2007. She describes how women who use upright positions and are mobile during labor have shorter labors, less intervention, report less severe pain, and describe more satisfaction with their childbirth experience than women in recumbent positions.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #3: Bring a Loved One, Friend, or Doula for Continuous Support," Jeanne Green and Barbara Hotelling provide an updated evidence-based review of the "Lamaze International Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #3: Continuous Labor Support" published in JPE, 16(3), 2007. They describe why women should be allowed and encouraged to bring a loved one, friend, or doula to their birth without financial or cultural barriers.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #4: Avoid Interventions That Are Not Medically Necessary," Judith Lothian provides an updated evidence-based

review of the "Lamaze International Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #4: No Routine Interventions" published in JPE, 16(3), 2007. She discusses how routine interventions such as the use of intravenous fluids, restrictions on eating and drinking, continuous electronic fetal monitoring, epidural analgesia, augmentation of labor, and the use of episiotomy disturb the normal physiology of labor and birth and restrict women's ability to cope with labor. The result is a cascade of interventions that increase risk, including the risk of cesarean surgery, for women and babies.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #5: Avoid Giving Birth on Your Back and Follow Your Body's Urge to Push," Joyce DiFranco and Marilyn Curl provide an updated evidence-based review of the "Lamaze International Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #5: Spontaneous Pushing in Upright or Gravity-Neutral Positions" published in JPE, 16(3), 2007. They discuss the current research and suggestions on how to improve the quality of the birth experience.

In the article "Healthy Birth Practice #6: Keep Mother and Baby Together—It's Best for Mother, Baby, and Breastfeeding," Jeannette Crenshaw provides an updated evidence-based review of the "Lamaze International Care Practices That Promote Normal Birth, Care Practice #6: No Separation of Mother and Baby, With Unlimited Opportunities for Breastfeeding" published in JPE, 16(3), 2007. She discusses how mothers and babies have a physiologic need to be together at the moment of birth and during the hours and days that follow. Evidence supports immediate, uninterrupted skin-to-skin care after vaginal birth and during and after cesarean surgery for all stable mothers and babies, regardless of feeding preference.

Finally, in the article "A Paradigm of Normal Birth: Teaching Through the Healthy Birth Practices," Debra McAllister, a childbirth educator with 9 years of experience as a labor and delivery nurse, provides commentary on how she teaches through the Six Healthy Birth Practices as a paradigm for normal birth.

A growing body of research continues to provide evidence for the benefits of supporting the normal physiologic process of labor and birth and the risks of interfering with this natural process.

WENDY C. BUDIN is the editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Perinatal Education*. She is also the director of nursing research at NYU Langone Medical Center and adjunct professor at New York University, College of Nursing. She is a fellow in the American College of Childbirth Educators and is a member of the Lamaze International Certification Council.