Evaluating Changes to Maternal Birthing Experiences due to COVID-19
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**Background**
- A positive birthing experience takes planning and communication on behalf of the patient, their support system, and the healthcare team.
- Supportive visitors during labor/delivery have a positive impact on the birth experience including:
  - Less fear of birth
  - Increased vaginal births
  - Decreased use of epidurals and instrumental vaginal births
  - Less labor pain
  - Improved APGAR scores
- COVID-19 resulted in restrictions on the number of supportive visitors permitted during labor/delivery.
- Common practice for area hospitals and birthing centers went from several to only one or two supportive visitor present during labor/delivery.
- To better serve the needs of patients, one urban birthing center sought to learn how plans for supportive visitors during labor/delivery changed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

**Methods**

**Survey Development**
- CDC guidelines for labor/delivery during COVID-19 reviewed to address:
  - How labor/delivery protocols for supportive visitors changed
  - Birthing concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Survey questions developed to cover changes in labor/delivery location, changes in supportive visitors, and fears of delivering during COVID-19
- Questions reviewed by two clinical experts (nurse midwife and nursing instructor) for content validity and format.

**Objectives**
- Develop and implement a survey to assess how new mothers’ original labor/delivery support plans changed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

**Survey**
- Survey of New Mothers’ Labor/Delivery Support Plans During COVID-19
- Question Item Response Options
  1. Did you need to change the location for labor and delivery? Yes/No
  2. What was your main reason for changing the location? Write in
  3. Did you need to adjust the number of your friends/family attending the birth? Yes/No
  4. Who was the main person you chose to attend the birth? Partner/Spouse, Doula, Family Member, Friend, Other
  5. What was your main fear of delivering during COVID? Write in

**Project Implementation**
- **Design**
  - Cross-sectional survey of women who delivered during COVID-19
- **Setting**
  - Federally qualified healthcare center located in a predominantly Hispanic, low-income population dense, suburb of a large metropolitan area
  - Approximately 19 new prenatal care patients admitted monthly
  - Birthing center provides labor/delivery for an average of 8-10 low risk mothers and infants each month
- **Participants**
  - Inclusion criteria: prenatal patient seen at federally qualified health center who delivered a live birth between April 1 and July 4, 2020
  - Recruitment: women were identified through review of the medical record and contacted via phone to invite them to complete a survey regarding their labor/delivery
- **Protocol**
  - Women who expressed interest and verbally consented were given the option to complete the survey over the phone or via a link sent in a MyChart message
  - For women not reached by phone, a voicemail was left explaining the survey and told about the link to the survey in MyChart
**Analysis**
- Write in responses were transcribed and put into like categories by 2 nurses.

**Results**

**Participant Recruitment and Participation**
- Delivered a live birth April 1 to July 4, 2021: 69
- Contacted via phone: 47
- Participated in survey: 20
- 29% of eligible women participated in the survey

**Labor/Delivery Locations**
- Reason for changing the location
  - Restrictive COVID-19 supportive visitor policies: 5
  - Fear of exposure to COVID: 3
  - To minimize hospital exposure: 4
  - Fear of having baby taken away: 2
  - Safety and health concerns not related to COVID-19: 2
  - Provider concerns: 1
  - Over half of the women had to change their location for labor/delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions related to supportive visitors.
- 65% of the women’s partners were their main supportive visitor.
- 29% of eligible women participated in the survey.

**Support Visitors**
- Needed to adjust number of support visitors attending the birth: 14
  - Partner/spouse: 13
  - Family Member: 3
  - Doula: 1
  - 70% of the women had to adjust their number of supportive visitors during labor and delivery.

**Fears of Delivering During COVID-19**
- Fear of Exposure of baby to COVID-19: 6
  - Being exposed to COVID: 4
  - Losing support visitor related to restriction: 3
  - Being separated from baby after birth: 2
  - Lack of trust in healthcare staff: 1
  - Having to wear a mask during labor: 1
  - Fear of the hospital: 1
  - Support staff getting COVID: 1
  - Having to labor alone: 1
  - Having to alter birth plan: 1
  - 33% of women expressed fear of exposure to baby during labor and delivery.

**Conclusions**
- A majority of respondents made some change to their labor/delivery supportive visitor plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A majority of women expressed having fears of delivering during COVID-19.
- Findings suggest to ease patient fears of COVID-19 there is a need to continually update resources outlining what to expect and precautions taken during labor/delivery.
- Ongoing evaluation of restrictive policies for supportive visitors is needed to ensure that laboring clients receive the support needed during labor/delivery.