

Midwives as Laborists/Hospitalists

The term “hospitalist” was coined by two California physicians in 1996 to describe a doctor who works exclusively in the hospital, providing in-patient care for people just during their hospital stay, thus freeing doctors who are working in an office or clinic from the stresses of running back and forth between outpatient and inpatient duties. From this concept grew the term “laborist,” meaning an obstetrical provider who is employed by the hospital to provide OB services in the hospital only. The laborist can triage patients who present with problems during pregnancy or for a labor check, care for women who come in through the emergency room, and manage the labors and deliveries of women whose own providers are not available on site, or who do not have their own providers.

Midwives are ideally suited to this position, since they have traditionally cared for underserved populations, are well-equipped to care for women in labor (either managing the care of healthy women in labor, or collaboratively managing the care of women with medical or obstetrical problems), and are trained to provide continuous care and high-quality service throughout labor, delivery, and postpartum. Organizations like Federally Qualified Health Centers have adopted this model, and are using midwives as laborists in some settings to provide in-patient midwifery care.

Benefits to Providers, Patients and Healthcare Systems of Adding the Laborist Model

- Laborists can count on regular, sustainable work hours without the overhead of an office.
- The laborist’s professional liability insurance is provided as a part of the hospital policy.
- Laborists are available to “run the board” when OB residents are off the floor for their educational obligations or busy with other patients.
- The presence of the laborist allows out-patient providers to concentrate on ambulatory patients and out-patient procedures, and to take less call.
- The laborist can spend plenty of time with the patients in the hospital, since they have no office to rush back to, so patients can enjoy the professional vigilance and warm human touch that are hallmarks of midwifery care.
- Patients in the hospital can count on the presence and availability of a provider at the time of need, and hospitals can advertise that they provide continuous personal care in labor.
- Hospitals can increase patient safety, lower their liability risk for high acuity care, and gain the ability to bill for their services.

What a Midwife Laborist Does

A midwife laborist might begin the day with rounds in the postpartum and/or antenatal wings of the hospital. The rest of the shift is then spent mostly in Labor and Delivery. Daily duties might include triaging women who may or may not be in labor, oversight of labor induction and augmentation, pain management including epidurals, labor support, working with nursing staff to provide hands-on care for patients, first-assisting in cesarean surgeries, and evaluating pregnant women who present to the emergency department for a variety of reasons. Midwife laborists sometimes fill new needs as they arise, adding expanded practice skills like circumcision and ultrasound.

Professional Organizations and Resources

- The Society of Hospital Medicine (SHM) is an organization which promotes the highest quality care of all hospitalized patients through education, advocacy, and research, and welcomes a variety of healthcare providers, including midwives. SHM’s monthly publication, *The*

Hospitalist, can be accessed online for free at www.HospitalMedicine.org. The January 2007 issue of *The Hospitalist* contains an article entitled, “Skilled Labor: Nurse-Midwife Laborists add value to hospital-based care models.”

- For dialogue regarding hospitalist/laborist issues from a CNM/CM perspective, ACNM members can join the eMidwife discussion group by going to http://www.midwife.org/discussion_list.cfm, and clicking on “subscribe now,” then choosing “laborists.”
- There is usually an educational session on midwives as laborists at the ACNM Annual Meeting.
- If you are among the quickly-growing number of midwife laborists, ACNM is interested in hearing from you. Please contact the Department of Professional Services at info@acnm.org or 240-485-1844.

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