

MARIN SYMPHONY MASTERWORKS 2 THE ROMANCE OF RODRIGO



On-Call Midwives and Obstetricians Lead to Lower C-section Rates

Nearly 33 percent of women in U.S. hospitals give birth via cesarean section, up from 21 percent in 1996. Given that the procedure increases the risk of health problems, including hemorrhage, hysterectomy and infection, it's a disturbing trend. Previously established reasons for the increase include a greater number of induced labors, older moms and multiple births. However, a joint study by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco and Marin General Hospital uncovered a new factor: women are less likely to deliver by C-section when hospitals hire in-house midwives and obstetricians to manage patients' labor and delivery.

The study evolved after researchers noted Marin General's private-health insurance patients had significantly higher C-section rates than public-health patients. However, those numbers began to even out after April 2011, when Prima Medical Group — a large doctor-owned practice with offices in Marin, Napa and Sonoma — changed its maternity coverage model. Previously, doctors answered calls from home or from the office and managed most of the labor remotely. "But then our practice began following the same model as the public health system, where we have midwives and obstetricians staffing the hospital round-the-clock," says Sheri Matteo, director of midwifery service for Prima Medical Group. The result: the primary C-section rates dropped from 31.7 percent to 25 percent. And the VBAC rate (vaginal birth after C-section) jumped from 13.3 percent to 22.4 percent.

Researchers speculate several reasons the in-house model may have resulted in fewer C-sections. One theory: previously, competing surgical and office responsibilities might have influenced a provider's decision on C-section during labor complications. Another factor: Prima's new maternity protocol allows patients to choose whether the in-house midwife or the OB manages delivery. And since the on-site staffing change was implemented, the majority of patients — 60 percent, up from 16 percent with the old model — chose the midwife option. "Doctors tend to favor early intervention, while a midwife is more willing to work with a woman wanting to take a wait-and-see approach," Matteo says.

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