

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Healthy Growth and Development

Early growth and development have a profound effect on health across the life span. Developmental disabilities can often be mitigated if they are detected early. Every week in Wisconsin almost 100 infants are born with low birth weight, and about six percent of those will die before their first birthday. Hospitals are striving to decrease infant mortality by providing pre-conception and inter-conception care to those affected by poor birth outcomes.

Addressing infant mortality

Nurses at Froedtert & The Medical College initiated and are leading a new project addressing the high infant mortality rate in our community. Called We CARE, the project will help new parents understand safe sleep practices and the risks of bed sharing. It was initiated by nurses in the Birth Center and the Mother/Baby Unit after a series of high-profile infant deaths in Milwaukee resulting from adults co-sleeping with babies.

“It is heart wrenching – some of the babies who died came through our unit,” said Marilynn Klemstein, BSN, RN, and an international board-certified lactation consultant, who developed We CARE with colleague Nicole Abraham, BSN, RN, who is a certified lactation counselor.

Now, patients receive safe-sleep education, including an overview of factors that can reduce Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), an explanation of the difference between room- and bed-sharing and a discussion of alternatives to expensive cribs, Marilynn said.

“Through the project, we will also follow up with phone calls to re-emphasize safe-sleep practices,” she said. The program will eventually repeat safe-sleep concepts at numerous touch points, such as during prenatal consultations, upon patient admission to the hospital, during their stay and at discharge.

“It sounds cliché, but it’s all worthwhile if we can save even one life,” Marilynn said.

Froedtert Hospital, Milwaukee

Centering Pregnancy to address teen pregnancy and infant mortality

In Milwaukee, the African American infant mortality rate in 2008 was 17.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, more than 3 times greater than the white infant mortality rate (Milwaukee Health Department figures). The leading causes of infant mortality in this population are disorders related to preterm birth (<37 weeks gestation) and low birth weight (<2,500 grams). According to the United Way, the City of Milwaukee has one of the highest teen birth rates in the US. Only about 30 percent of teen mothers finish their high school education.

The Centering Pregnancy model gathers pregnant girls together in a group for their prenatal care and education at the high school they attend. This decreases their need to miss school for prenatal visits that are essential for healthy birth outcomes. The group is facilitated by a clinical team led by a nurse midwife. During the course of their pregnancies the girls weigh themselves, estimate gestational ages and record their health information. Within their peer group they discuss topics related to pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, personal growth, development, relationships and birth control. By taking more control in their own prenatal care as a group, and supporting one another, they are able to build on each other’s knowledge, increase personal interactions, and expand a social support network with their pregnant peers for moving forward with their lives.

In Milwaukee, the Centering Pregnancy program is a partnership between the Aurora Midwifery and Wellness Center (MWC) based at Aurora Sinai Medical Center (ASMC); Aurora School-based Clinics, Milwaukee Public Schools, and the Wisconsin Partnership Fund. The program meets on the North Division High School campus. The young women deliver their babies at Aurora Sinai Medical Center and are referred to other Aurora services that support healthy birth/healthy life outcomes, including Aurora Family Service programs; the Women, infant and Children’s clinic at ASMC; and Safe Mom Safe Baby (for pregnant women experiencing domestic violence).

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Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

Case #1: Tara

Tara is a Milwaukee-area high school student who comes from a family that has its own challenges. She is mature enough to both attend school full time and work full time, evenings, at a McDonald's. She does this so that she can live on her own, yet still provide support her two younger siblings still living at home but suffering from neglect.

That Tara responded to the attentions of a young man who was attracted to her is not surprising. That she found herself pregnant and suffered his resultant verbal abuse was a tragedy. That she became a more centered and stronger young woman is a testament to her fortitude and the value of participating in the Centering Pregnancy program.

Tara thrived in the Centering Pregnancy model. Along with her peers who were at varying gestational stages, she learned the many things that her mother did not teach her. She learned about her cycle, about sexually transmitted diseases, about preventing a second pregnancy, about nutrition for herself and her baby, about safe sleep, about parenting her baby going forward and the importance of breastfeeding.

As did her peers, Tara delivered her baby full term, exceeding the goal of 37 weeks gestation and a birth weight goal of 5 pounds 8 ounces. She also finished high school and now successfully breast-feeds her baby.

Case #2: Sheila

When Sheila told her mother she was pregnant, Mom was visibly angry and refused to accept the diagnosis. Mom returned to the Aurora School-based clinic with her daughter where the pregnancy test had been performed. When the clinic manager repeated the procedure, she allowed Sheila's mother to observe the results.

Then, and only then, did Sheila's mother accept the truth. The school-based clinic manager referred them both to the Centering Pregnancy program at the school. One session was all it took for Sheila and her mom to take to the program. They came to every session together. Sheila's mom brought her younger daughter along, and together, their support for one another grew.

During her pregnancy, the pediatric nurse practitioner at the Aurora School-based Health Clinic recognized and diagnosed the symptoms of gestational diabetes. Working together with Sheila and her mom, the condition was well-managed and Sheila delivered her baby at term.

Sheila is proud of what she has accomplished. She and her mom enjoy returning to the group to tell their story and support young women who are pregnant.

Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Milwaukee

Family center helps parents prepare for new babies

Anticipating the arrival of their first child, Dawn and her husband attended free prenatal classes taught by the skilled and experienced staff of Memorial Health Center's birthing and delivery unit, the Family Center.

Together, the couple learned about the signs and symptoms of labor, how to manage labor pains, breathing and relaxation techniques, the process of birth, breastfeeding, how to care for an infant, how baby's introduction to the home may change family dynamics and how to cope, and much more.

"I especially appreciated the "Care of the Newborn" class," Dawn says. "The instructors showed us how to bathe a baby using a real newborn. The baby was screaming and crying. It tugged at my heart to hear that little baby screaming, but it helped us prepare for getting that reaction when our own baby came along. We also learned how to hold the baby, what to do, how to calm it down, things that might work. It was so useful."

Dawn says without the classes she wouldn't have been nearly as ready to give birth and take care of a new baby.

"As a first time parent, you have no idea about what to expect," she says. "The Family Center classes gave us a heads up so we could be better ready to handle everything. Thanks to the classes, I felt like 'okay, I can do this; the nurses teaching these classes can help me do this.' That's incredibly reassuring."

Memorial Health Center – An Aspirus Partner, Medford

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



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