

Midwives: providing full-spectrum care to expectant mothers



Local midwives Tiffany Holdsworth-Taylor and Rebecca Weeks celebrate with mother Meghan Brown as six-week-old Amelia announces that she is pleased as punch with the situation. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

The word 'midwife' conjures up a number of images - perhaps an old woman in a medieval peasant's hut leaning over a pregnant farm woman, or a nursing sister in the East End London slums of the 1950s (scene of the BBC drama series *Call the Midwife*).

But how about a well-rounded trained medical practitioner working in a local health clinic or hospital?

Rebecca Weeks is one of three midwives in the Haliburton and Bancroft area. Like all midwives in Ontario, she is a graduate of a four-year university program (almost always taken as a second diploma) specializing in the care of mothers and infants over the course of normal pregnancy, birth, and neo-natal care. Her university studies were half based in the classroom, and half working in the field. Midwife training includes an obstetrical rotation, as well as a rotation in the delivery room.

The hospital connection is surprising to some people, who assume that midwives only do home deliveries. In fact, they are licensed to do low-risk deliveries in Peterborough General (North Hastings hospital in Bancroft is not equipped to do deliveries).

The key factor is to give mothers an informed choice about where they will give birth.

For women with no risk factors, research indicates that with the assistance of a trained midwife, home births demonstrate the same or better outcomes for both mother and child as a hospital delivery room. (In a rural area like ours, with our climate, a winter ambulance ride of 100 kilometres to access a hospital may not be a wise health decision in a low-risk situation.)

Another factor is continuity of care. An expectant mother can start seeing her midwife early in her pregnancy - as soon as it is confirmed, in fact. Appointments will be scheduled every four weeks until the 28th week, then every two weeks up to the 36th week, then every week until delivery. Appointments are 30 to 45 minutes long, to allow a full and free exchange of questions and information.

The mother will see the same midwife throughout her pregnancy; this midwife will be joined by a second midwife for the actual birth. Throughout the pregnancy, women have access to help 24-7 through a pager system.

Care continues after birth as well. The midwife will pay the new mother and child a home visit within 24 hours. Visits continue on a regular basis for six weeks, normally at the health clinic. The mother can expect training in lactation and breast-feeding, and the baby will have its heart and lungs checked and its growth monitored.

Working out of the North Hastings Family Health Team clinic, midwives and their clients are within a 'circle of care' and health support for clinical consultations and procedures.

That sounds like a good start to life.

If you want to learn more about midwifery in Ontario, you can visit the website www.aom.on.ca. You can get in touch with local midwives through the North Hastings Family Health Team.