

## The True Value of Professional Labor Support

As science and technology rapidly develops, the human body and spirit are pushed farther and farther to the side. Natural pregnancy and birth are seen as a waste of the latest and greatest methods of producing a perfect outcome, another notch in the belt for our increasingly technical medical society. During this process, mothers are forgotten. Streamlined and pushed through the efficient practice of "pre-natal" care. The average contact with an Ob/Gyn is approximately 6 minutes during a visit. Mothers are left to their own resources to inform and prepare. The overwhelming amount of information available only makes this process more confusing. If they are lucky and informed, they will use a midwife. But even now, not all midwives can spend longer periods of time with individual moms.

This is when a Doula is most valuable. A doula serves. She serves as a filter for the avalanche of questions and answers an expectant mother and family may have. She serves as an anchor to help the family learn their choices and to remain firm in their decisions and beliefs. She serves as a confidant, allowing the family to express concerns, fears and expectations without judgment. She serves as muse hoping to inspire the family to make empowering choices. She serves as an advocate for mother and child during times when strength may waver. She serves as a woman, with her heart and hands; her most important tool. This is her most important role. Just as those before her have experienced the power women create during birth, the doula passes this strength to others. By providing physical and emotions support during labor and birth, the doula brings the spirit of mothers past into the soul of the mother. Giving her the strength and courage to trust in herself and her baby.

Labor support provides many different levels of care. It can be as simple as sitting quietly while a laboring mother sleeps. Just the presence of an experienced woman reduces stress, reassures family during labor and gives mothers piece of mind. Mothers without a support system or an unsure partner can experience fear and tension. This can greatly affect her labor progress. Fear increases the intensity of pain. A doula can help by working with the mother and family prior to labor. Expelling myths and providing accurate, non-biased information are of extreme importance. With increased levels of knowledge, a mother begins to take back her natural rights to birth without intervention or interferences. She takes back control.

Along with the knowledge the doula brings, there is physical care. Physical touch has been proven in hundreds of studies to decrease pain, lower blood pressure and lessen the risk of health complications. Touch has been used in the care of pre-term infants for years. It has been shown to increase growth and physical healing and decrease the length of hospitalization. Massage during labor stimulates natural pain chemicals within the laboring mothers body, allowing her to cope without the need for medical intervention.

A simple back rub provides not only pain relief, but a rhythm for the mother to follow. Rocking, swaying or rocking again provides a natural rhythm for the mother to follow. As a team, the mother, doula and partner create a circle of strength. Constant presence, touch and reassurance bind the circle until it is almost impenetrable. It is the Doulas role to keep this circle strong from beginning of labor and beyond. She is responsible for absolute and unquestioning support of the mother. She is connected only to this laboring family. By making the commitment to this family, at that moment, the doula insures no conflict of interest. This allows a mother to completely trust in the care provided without concern of ulterior motives or financial gain. It is the Doulas responsibility to be trustworthy and consistent. Ethical and moral. Reliable and available. But above all, it is the Doulas responsibility to remember that the birth belongs to the family. It is not her birth. Her ability to provide constant supportive care would be of no value if she takes on the birth as her own. It would be a injustice to the family and defeat the purpose of doula care.

Returning to the birth journey of our ancestral sisters, the doula brings the whispers of these mothers past to strengthen, give courage and confirm ability to the laboring mother. The greatest accomplishment of the doula is helping to give the family joyous and fulfilling birth memories. By doing this she adds the new mothers whisper of encouragement to the next birthing mother.