



## A Different Kind of Cesarean Section



Jamie Lipeles, DO

Childbirth tops the list of life's greatest moments. While many couples write birth plans to explain their hopes for childbirth, those wishes may be set aside if conditions warrant a cesarean delivery. Creating the ideal cesarean delivery for the family can help reduce fear and lead to a more satisfactory patient experience.

Jamie Lipeles, DO, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center Torrance, recently helped design and implement a program to improve the experience of cesarean section in order to give families the kind of birth experience they desire. Dr. Lipeles has spent several years thinking about and studying methods to improve the C-section birth experience. We asked him to explain this refined philosophy.

### **Q:** Do patients' views of childbirth sometimes conflict with physicians' views of the experience?

"Every mother has envisioned what a perfect delivery would be. When you have a vaginal delivery, the new parents are typically surrounded by family, a doula or midwife and the nurses. There is often a sense of tranquility and peace in the labor and delivery room. With a C-section, most doctors see it as a surgery. Yes, it's surgery, but we can't forget that there is a patient who is becoming a mother."

### What prompted the creation of the Gentle C-section?

"As childbirth has evolved, doctors have been challenged to figure out all the things people want from their cesarean delivery. I found that a vast majority of women who underwent a C-section shared the same feelings towards the surgery. I was shocked to hear how frequently fear was present. When I looked and listened further, I found that almost all of these fears stemmed from processes that can easily be eliminated or altered."

### What is a Gentle C-section?

"It's a family-centered cesarean delivery that focuses on creating a gentle, enjoyable and tranquil experience for everyone. As opposed to just the patient and husband or partner, one other person can be in the operating room. It can be a doula, sister or mother or whomever the patient wishes. It doesn't alter our ability to do our jobs to have two people in the operating room.

We also allow the mother to watch the baby being born. Women who have C-sections sometimes say they feel robbed of the traditional birthing experience. Everyone

puts up a big, blue drape that prevents the mother from seeing the baby being born. We use see-through drapes so if the patient wants, we can elevate her head and she can watch. This allows the mom to see her baby's first facial expression, witness her baby's first breath and appreciate being a more active participant.

We also let the respiratory therapist or neonatologist resuscitate the baby on mom's chest. That's the best place for the baby's temperature regulation, and mom can ease her baby's transition into life through touch."

### Are there benefits from this immediate skin-to-skin contact?

"Yes. Resuscitation on mom's chest also stimulates a shorter interval into breastfeeding. If the baby is hungry, we can have a lactation consultant or nurse there to assist in initiating breastfeeding. All of the Providence nursing staff are trained in lactation support. Evidence has shown time and again that early breastfeeding is beneficial to both the newborn baby and the well-being of the new mother."

### Does the atmosphere even seem like an operating room?

"With a vaginal delivery, the mood is often light. Why should that stop in a C-section? Obstetricians perform so many C-sections in our careers, it becomes second nature; we can still focus with music playing and interaction with others in the room. Throughout history music has calmed people. It has set the mood for weddings to life celebrations to childbirth. Why would we change that in the birth of child by C-section?


In the visits before a scheduled C-section, we can get to know what the patient wants and what would make their day outstanding. An extra five to 10 minutes of work can make a huge difference in what will be remembered for the rest of the patient's life."

### Do mothers recover faster if they experience a Gentle C-section?

"If done correctly, recovery from our Gentle C-section can be the same as recovery from a first vaginal delivery. Extensive



## WHAT IS A GENTLE C-SECTION?

- Immediate skin-to-skin bonding in the operating room (if mom and baby are stable)
- Ability to begin breastfeeding in the operating room if the baby begins rooting
- Baby remains with mom in the operating room if everyone is stable
- Option of using a clear, plastic surgical sheet so the mom can watch her baby being born
  - Choice of music in the operating room 
  - Option of having two family members, friends or midwife/doula accompany the expecting mother in the operating room
  - Option of asking questions of the surgeon and/or medical staff during the procedure
  - Option of eating or drinking immediately following cesarean delivery if stable



research has been done in identifying which steps in a traditional C-section cause the most post-op pain. If these steps are performed with finesse and in a certain manner, the level of post-op pain can be drastically reduced.

We can implant a non-narcotic pain pump that is used for three or four days. If we can control pain this way, most patients won't need narcotic pain medication. Mom will be more easily able to bond with the baby and narcotics won't be in the breast

milk. It's rare for patients not to go home on post-op day two after our Gentle C."

### How did the hospital develop this program?

"Over one-third of deliveries are performed by cesarean section. Yet C-sections don't get nearly as much appreciation and TLC as vaginal deliveries. We listened to patients, midwives, doulas and other health care professionals. We grabbed the best practices of every surgeon we've worked with to create what we think is the perfect C-section. We looked at research in America and abroad and kept a list of things patients requested but were denied."

### Has there been any resistance to this style of C-section?

"We had some difficulty at first. People would say it was against the rules and regulations to fulfill some of the requested activities in the operating room. After challenging their resistance, we found that these aversions were a product of habits that have compounded over the years and that many of these activities could be done in an operating room setting.

My hat (or scrub cap) goes off to the staff at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center Torrance; their team-based, family-centered approach to patient safety and satisfaction transcends any hospital that competes with them. They have gone above and beyond what I've expected in making this program a reality. The hospital has all of the amenities and technology for safety protocols. But this is not just about medicine. This is a personal, intimate moment for a family. They have welcomed the Gentle C-section with open arms."

### Any final words?

"With the Gentle C, the patients no longer have to fear surgery. Just because you have one C-section doesn't mean you will always have them. We created steps in surgery to decrease the risks that would limit the ability to have a vaginal birth after C-section (VBAC). The patient can rest assured that bringing their baby into the world by C-section can be a pleasant, exciting and memorable experience."