

Adding Insult to Injury...

Contributed by Beth Overton, CPM

I just finished reading the birth story of an online friend I call "Carrie." She does not live in Texas; we "met" through an email group. Carrie had planned an unassisted home birth but ended up needing a c-section at 34 weeks due to HELLP syndrome. Carrie was well educated and made a very careful and informed decision to do an unassisted birth. Although I would not normally be quick to agree with a completely unassisted birth if a good midwife is available, I do believe there are circumstances in which an unassisted birth might be the best decision for some women. And I do believe that the choice belongs to the mother. And when she makes her choice as carefully as Carrie did, she has my respect.

Carrie did her own prenatal care. She took good care of herself and had a healthy diet. Friends thought she was bit crazy, but she assured them that she would go to the doctor or hospital if any problems developed. Unfortunately, a problem did develop; in the course of her pregnancy, she began to feel ill. But Carrie was as good as her word; she did seek a physician's help. It turned out that she had developed HELLP syndrome, a very serious condition which can come on very suddenly, as it did in Carrie's case. The doctor didn't even think it was HELLP at first, but blood work confirmed that it was. She was taken immediately to the hospital and had to have an early c-section. She ended up having to recover from surgery and HELLP syndrome, and had a premature baby in the hospital for a long time, too. All of this is more than enough to have to deal with, but Carrie's problems did not end there. They were compounded by people judging her. She was treated as though she were stupid, and all because she had chosen not to be under a doctor's care for her entire pregnancy. Those posturing themselves as her judge and jury fail to acknowledge that it was Carrie who realized she needed medical attention in the first place and that it was she who sought out that medical attention in time. In my opinion, she demonstrated that she was taking good care of herself; she recognized when she needed to get medical help. She did nothing that merited the condescension and judgmental attitude to which she was subjected.

Medical practitioners often come across with god complexes. Mind you, I'm not saying that all medical people do this, or that they do so all the time, but often—too often, in fact—medical practitioners do come across with god complexes. They conveniently "forget" that their own "patients" get sick while under their care. Seeing a midwife for care during her pregnancy—or even going unassisted—does not in and of itself "make" a woman sick. It just happens sometimes. When such "professionals" act so unprofessionally, they are adding insult to injury, and it is just so wrong! Carrie's story is a good example of the fact that women can and do know what is going on with their own bodies, especially during pregnancy. I believe that women should be just as in tune to their own bodies and their own pregnancies, and they should take personal responsibility for their desired birth outcome. This attitude of taking personal responsibility for one's own pregnancy and birth in my opinion is just as important—sometimes more so—as "whom" you see for prenatal, intrapartum and postpartum care. Granted, not all women take this attitude. Not all are as motivated, as self-aware and conscientious as Carrie, but there are a lot more women out there like Carrie, more than society in general—and the medical community in particular—can even imagine. Carrie's tribe is legion. I want to write more about this. My first draft, as a matter of fact, was more than twice the length of this blog entry. So I'll draw this to a close for now, but I reserve the right to blog more on this subject in the not too distant future. Stay tuned! ~ Beth