

Options abound for moms-to-be



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Midwife Kim Mosny (right) spends time with one of her former patients, Stephanie Mazella, and her 8-month-old baby, Rowan. Mazella's pregnancy was deemed low risk, so she opted for a midwife and natural birth at home.

By Katherine Houston
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Turn on a TV or a watch a movie that depicts the birth process, and one image prevails: a woman in a hospital bed, legs in stirrups, hollering for an epidural. It's not often you see a woman laboring on a birthing ball in her own home or sitting in a water tub in the hospital, but these are very real options. For women with low-risk pregnancies who are seeking a natural-birth experience, certified nurse-midwives can help deliver babies in a hospital setting or at one's own home.

"Midwifery is a holistic model of women's maternity care," explains Kim Mosny, a licensed midwife who provides home-birth services. "The concept is that birth is a normal physiologic process of a woman's body, and we trust that birth is normal, healthy and safe."

Nurse-midwives provide complete individualized prenatal care, though they do consult with obstetricians when complications arise. With midwifery, the expectant mother is often more involved with her care, coming up with a birth plan that explains how, ideally, she would like to deliver her baby, often without epidurals.

"Midwifery care is about being with women and supporting women for whatever it is they want in birth and educating them on their options, guiding them in prenatal classes, just teaching them about the birth process," says Leslie Fehan, a certified nurse-midwife and women's health nurse practitioner with The Woman's Center at Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital. "Seventy-five percent of our patients have unmedicated births, so women tend to seek our care because that's what they want."

The Woman's Center at St. Francis, which features three certified nurse-midwives and a supervising ob-gyn, is the only midwifery practice on the Southside that supports unmedicated, natural childbirth in a hospital setting. The center's 12 birthing rooms — homelike settings in which women labor and deliver babies — have birthing balls and stools that can help labor progress and make women more comfortable. Half of them also feature tubs for water therapy.

"You like to have a whole range of things available to you as you work through labor," explains Dr. Julie Reagan, administrative

director for mother-infant services for Bon Secours Virginia. "You don't know what you'll want until you're in there."

For home births, Mosny and her two apprentices help the woman labor at her own home, using similar supplies, including mobile water tubs. If complications arise during childbirth, Mosny will transport clients to the hospital, though she has only had to do so five times in 17 years and 350-plus births.

Women may also employ doulas, or a person who assists with emotional and physical support during labor and during and after the delivery. Though not staffed by Chesterfield hospitals like St. Francis and CJW Medical Center, doulas are often welcome in the delivery rooms.

"There have been studies that have shown that women who have the continuous support from another woman in labor have shorter labors and use less pain medication in labor," says Fehan. "As an expert in labor, a doula helps normalize the process for her, helps lessen her anxiety and fears and provides another set of hands in the birthing room."

Group prenatal care, in which women with similar due dates meet in groups to share, ask questions and learn more about pregnancy and parenting, has also become popular at St. Francis and CJW's Chippenham Hospital. Called "centering," the program at St. Francis starts in the second trimester when the mothers-to-be meet with health professionals in a group setting for two-hour sessions. One-on-one sessions begin around week 36.

"The big outcome of centering is really patient satisfaction," says Fehan. "Women feel much more connected and like they know a lot more when they're entering birth and postpartum phases. It brings women together. We started about four and a half years ago, and our first group still meets and has play dates together."

For those seeking a more traditional birth experience, both St. Francis and CJW offer on-site dedicated OB anesthesiologists 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as well as private labor rooms. CJW Johnston-Willis also features 15 antepartum beds for high-risk patients, the most on the Southside.

"We've really worked hard at improving our high-risk unit because we do get patients

see **BIRTH**, page 28



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Thursday, November 18

6:30 - 8:30pm

St. Francis, Main Lobby
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Midlothian, VA 23114

Sunday, November 21

2 - 4pm

St. Mary's, MOB Northwest
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