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What is a Birth Center?

- The birth center is an innovation in the delivery of care to healthy, childbearing women and families. It is a homelike facility, existing within a healthcare system with a program of care designed in the wellness model of pregnancy and birth.
- Birth centers are guided by principles of prevention, sensitivity, safety, appropriate medical intervention, and cost effectiveness.
- Birth centers provide personalized, family-centered care for healthy women before, during and after normal pregnancy, labor and birth.
- Birth centers include a team of highly qualified professionals from midwifery, nursing, obstetrics, family medicine, pediatrics, nutrition, social work, physical fitness, childbirth, and parenting education.
- Birth center midwifery providers include Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) and Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs).
- Freestanding birth centers achieve better outcomes than hospitals on quality measures such as cesarean rate for low risk women, elective delivery prior to 39 weeks, and breastfeeding. Birth Centers are a safe option for women experiencing a low risk pregnancy. Birth centers use fewer medical interventions; this saves health dollars and reduces the risk of complications.^{1,2}

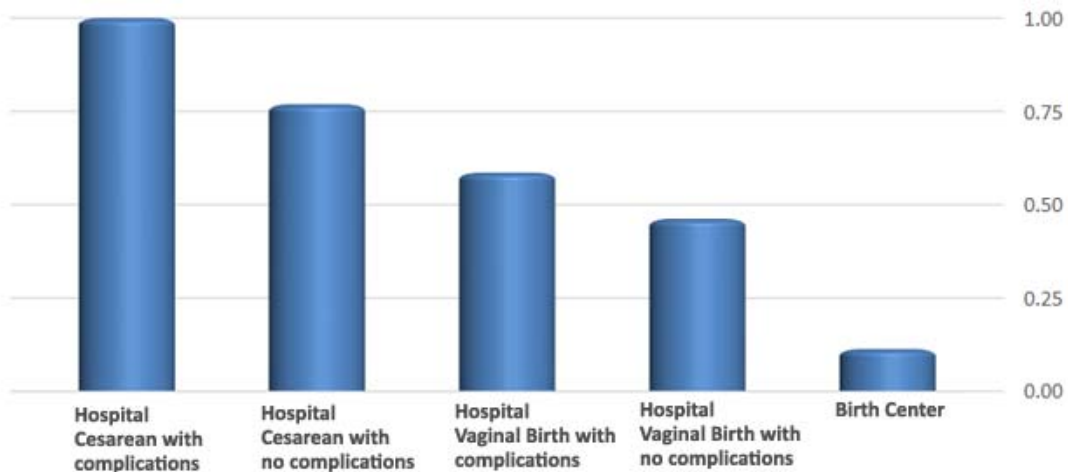
Birth Centers are Growing

There are currently 344 birth centers in 39 states and DC. The birth center industry experienced a 76% increase since 2010, and it continues to grow.

Additionally, data from the CDC National Center for Vital Statistics shows a steady increase in the number of birth center births. From 2007-2014, the annual number of birth center births grew by 59.4%. This while the annual number of U.S. births decreased by 7.6% during the same period.³



Birth Center Savings^{4,5}



What is the birth center experience?

- The quality of care in birth centers has remained consistent. "The National Birth Center Study," published in 1989, reported the low overall intrapartum and neonatal mortality rate of 1.3/1000 births. The preliminary analysis of data in the AABC Uniform Data Set (2012) shows a comparable intrapartum and neonatal mortality rate of 1.6/1,000. These rates are comparable to studies of low risk, in-hospital births.^{1, 2}
- The cesarean section rate for women receiving care in birth centers averages 6.1%, approximately one half that in studies of low risk, in-hospital births.²
- Birth Centers have consistently displayed charges for care for normal birth that average up to 50% less than charges for an uncomplicated birth in the hospital.^{3, 4}
- More than half of birth centers include routine laboratory exams, childbirth education, home visits, extra office visits, and initial newborn examinations in their charges.
- Most major health insurers contract with birth centers for reimbursement. Because charges reflect cost and since the birth center is a single service unit, there is no opportunity for cost shifting or operating the birth center as a "loss leader" to other services.
- 98.8 percent of women using the birth center would recommend it to friends and/or return to the center for a subsequent birth.¹

What are the benefits to families?

- The birth center approaches pregnancy and birth as a normal family event until proven otherwise. The program encourages family involvement and provides a safe environment for families to experience the social, emotional, and spiritual renewal inherent in birthing forth new life while attending to the possibility that a problem may arise that will require medical intervention or care in the acute care setting of the hospital. This is in opposition to the view that pregnancy is an illness and birth a medical/surgical event that needs to be cured.
- The birth center program of education encourages parents to become informed and self-reliant; to assume responsibility for their own health and the health of the family.
- The birth center brings generations together to celebrate new life by encouraging grandparents and children to participate in the birth center program.

- Birth centers have demonstrated that they are a viable alternative to unattended home birth and to costly hospital acute care for more than 35 years. It is now time to mainstream these services.

What are the benefits to business and industry?

- Birth centers offer business and industry direct savings in the cost of health benefits. If even 10 percent (400,000) of the 4 million women who give birth in the U.S. each year delivered their babies in Birth Centers, the savings in facility fee payments alone would be at least \$2.6 billion.^{3,4}
- The birth center program provides a starting base for the wellness and prevention programs being established in industry.
- The family is the hinge pin of the employee. Industry's support of a program that encourages family unity, self-determination, and responsible health can only improve employee performance.
- Birth center care encourages childbearing women (who may also be employees) to be confident in the design of their bodies. Such confidence, in turn, builds self-esteem and starts the young family off on thinking of pregnancy, birth, and family health as wellness, not disease.
- The nine-month intensive focus on improving family health through the promotion of lifestyle changes in pregnancy can have a significant ripple effect in the long-term improvement of family health.

How will it affect the hospital acute care service?

- Birth centers have had a major impact on humanizing the acute care maternity services provided by hospitals. Note the rise in hospital birthing rooms, in privileges for nurse-midwives, in childbirth education programs, and in more liberal attitudes about family participation.
- Birth centers are showing that the majority of women can safely proceed through pregnancy and birth using acute care services only as needed. In wellness orientation to pregnancy and birth, birth centers would be the managed care gatekeepers for the acute care obstetric newborn services.
- Birth centers eventually will help to reduce the number of costly hospital beds and expand primary care services.
- Birth centers will help to reduce dependency fostered by institutional confinement and strengthen the family's ability to share responsibility for maternity care and family health.
- Birth centers will help to develop a system of care based first on the needs of the family and second on the needs of medical education or product promotion.

How will it affect the obstetricians?

- Birth centers provide an opportunity for obstetricians and family physicians to learn, appreciate, and practice midwifery - time and education intensive, "with woman" - care.
- Birth centers provide an opportunity for obstetricians to invest in a service which will expand their patient base for referrals through transfers from the birth center and from a larger extended family base for their gynecological services. The birth center promotes the development of collaboration and a team approach to the delivery of primary care services to families enabling better use their specialist skills.

How is the quality of care assured in birth centers?

- Through the promotion of state regulations for licensure (41 states currently license birth centers)
- Through established National Standards which are reviewed annually (adopted in 1985)
- Through a Continuous Quality Improvement Program for Birth Centers (model program available)
- Through accreditation by the Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers (CABC)

How do birth centers contain costs?

- By retaining autonomy (control) over birth center operations and program regardless of ownership (some hospitals own freestanding birth centers)
- By providing “high touch” rather than “high tech” care, birth centers depend on the services of acute care hospital thereby minimizing the routine use of medical intervention and technology.
- By providing a program of primary care that emphasizes education, wellness, prevention, self help and self-reliance in family health maintenance
- By using staff efficiently; staff are only in-house when a mother is in-house. Since birth centers do not compete with emergency services or hospital acute care, levels of staff are used efficiently and appropriately
- By promoting responsibility with the childbearing family for health and prevention of illness
- By using existing community services when available (instead of creating costly duplications) for transport services, social services, medical consultation, laboratories, etc
- By using established policies and procedures for screening and transfer of women with problems to acute care services
- By using low cost construction that meets safety codes

About the American Association of Birth Centers

The American Association of Birth Centers (AABC) is a multidisciplinary membership organization comprised of birth centers, individuals and organizations that support the birth center model. Members include certified nurse-midwives (CNMs), certified professional midwives (CPMs), physicians, nurses, women and their families. Founded in 1983, AABC is dedicated to developing quality holistic services for childbearing families that promote self-reliance and confidence in birth and parenting in the wellness model of care.

¹ American Association of Birth Centers, Birth Center Outcome Data from AABC Perinatal Data Registry, Perkiomenville, PA. Unpublished data. Retrieved February, 2016.

² Hill, Ian et al. (2016). Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns II Second Annual Evaluation Report. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from https://downloads.cms.gov/files/cmmt/strongstartenhancedprenatalcare_evalrptyr2v2.pdf

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics Information. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm>

⁴ U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, HCUPnet, Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project. Rockville, MD: AHRQ. Available at: <http://hcupnet.ahrq.gov/>

⁵ American Association of Birth Centers, Practice Profile Data from AABC Perinatal Data Registry, Perkiomenville, PA. Unpublished data. Retrieved October 15, 2015.