

Improving Postpartum Care from Day One

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Abstract

Postpartum is an exhausting stage for parents, especially mothers. Lack of support during the postpartum period exacerbates the physical and mental toll faced by mothers. This paper proposes an improvement for government hospitals in Malaysia to improve their rules and regulations with regards to postpartum care and highlights the detriment of the current practice. This proposal allows mothers to receive support during postpartum from the moment they give birth, supporting the wellbeing of both mother and baby.

Opinion

Government hospitals in Malaysia do not allow companions to accompany mothers in the postnatal ward after the mothers give birth [1,2]. While this is commonly known, it raises a difficult question: Why are patients who just went through major, body-altering pain asked to wake up every two hours to feed a newborn without familial support? It is surprising that in other wards, patients are allowed to have overnight companions for support, but not in postnatal wards. Only private wards or higher-class wards allow overnight companions in the postnatal ward, making it an expensive privilege to be able to have postpartum support during the first day of giving birth.

Malaysian newspapers highlighted a despairing fact about children's death caused by physical abuse: the highest number of culprits were their own mothers [3]. This highlights the worrying mental state of mothers in Malaysia. The moments between pregnancy and the first year of giving birth are critical, where mental health issues among mothers can adversely impact their relationship with their baby [4]. Previous studies have clearly highlighted that in order to prevent depression, other mental problems, and the potential disruption of bonding between mother and baby, it is important to provide sufficient support to mothers after they give birth [5].

Women go through the most severe pain when giving birth [6]. Getting good quality postpartum rest allows mothers to have better bonding with their baby [7]. Mothers who receive less social support have a higher possibility to have postpartum depression [8]. Having gone through severe pain, not getting sufficient rest, and not receiving familial social support in the postnatal ward triples the struggle of mothers during the early stages of postpartum. Mothers with postpartum depression can cause adverse impacts on the psychology of their baby, where the impact can be seen in children for up to six years old [9].

It is therefore important to update the current regulations regarding the prohibition of postnatal ward companion in government hospitals in Malaysia. This paper proposes that a companion should be allowed to accompany mothers not only during childbirth, but in the postnatal ward as well. Given the norm in Malaysia that only women are allowed to sleep in the women's ward (barring special circumstances), the proposal is to also allow women family members to accompany mothers in the postnatal ward to help with both mother and baby care.

As the old saying goes 'It takes a village to raise a child', it needs to start from day one. It is hoped that government hospitals will take the initiative towards preventing postpartum mental problems from the moment a mother gives birth.

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