

The miracle of birth can be experienced at home

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

Imagine giving birth in the comfort of your own home, without the IV drip, constantly beeping monitors and murmurs in the hallways. Until 1940, almost all births occurred outside a hospital but by 1969 the percentage of non-hospital births had dropped to 1 percent. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more women are opting for home birth in the 21st century. Not since 1900 have so many U.S. women chosen to labor and birth at home.

Additionally, the decision to use a midwife for birthing support, rather than a doctor, is also on the rise. Midwifery as a practice has existed for centuries; these are individuals trained specifically in the care of pregnant women and newborn infants. Though licensed by the state, midwives cannot administer pain medication such as epidurals — such relief is not available for a home birth. A midwife can provide care throughout pregnancy, delivery and post-partum just as an obstetrician would. Use of a midwife rather than a medical doctor is a personal choice and typically covered by health insurance. Midwives, though often limited to registered nurse midwives, can be granted hospital privileges so in some cases women may have the option of birth at a hospital with their midwife.

Choosing to have your baby at home is a personal decision, which

may not be covered by health insurance. Oregon is one state seeing a rise in births outside of hospitals and the Oregon Health Plan will cover these births — with many stipulations. These are intended to ensure a safe, healthy birth for both mom and infant. “Theo-



retically, anyone can have a home birth, although there are certain risk factors which make hospital births a safer option,” says Tami Pelles, student midwife and practicing doula.

Several area moms interviewed for this article have delivered babies at home, each with successful and healthy outcomes for both mother and baby. Pendleton mom Alison Moses had a midwife on the way but ended up delivering the baby without assistance. Her reason for electing home birth was her ability to control the environment. “I was able to choose everything about the environment: who was there and what my emergency plan was. I was comfortable, I felt safe and strong.” For Hailey Pullen in La

Grande home birth was “...incredibly intimate, no nurses coming in and out of the room.”

Samantha Brown, herself a doula, cited the absolute freedom home birthing permits. Samantha delivered with the assistance of her husband but does not recommend unassisted birthing. “I definitely wish at times I would have had the extra set of hands.” All of the moms interviewed received prenatal care and had low-risk pregnancies.

Some opt for home birth due to the cost of labor and delivery at a hospital.

According to Providence Health & Services of Oregon and Southwest Washington, labor and delivery at one of their hospitals averages \$4,250 to \$4,700 for a vaginal delivery, no epidural, with a one-day stay. Not included is the newborn care, which is \$1,300-1,650 for a one-day stay, nor does it include the physician fees, labs or pharmacy which are all billed separately. This amount also does not include prenatal care, another cost billed separately.

Home birth with a midwife costs considerably less. Though it varies widely according to Tami Pelles, the average cost of midwife care is \$4,000+, which covers prenatal care (though not ultrasound or lab costs) labor, delivery, newborn and postpartum care. Additionally, an at-home birth kit is also needed.



Young Children

This kit includes items such as plastic to cover the area and absorbent pads for birthing plus items needed for the baby and postpartum care of the mother. These items are easily obtained and relatively inexpensive. Most midwives will provide a kit, either included in their fee or for an additional cost, or will provide a list of items needed for the home delivery.

Moms opting for water birth will incur cost of a birthing tub, which can be rented or purchased. The cost to purchase a birthing pool is between \$120 and \$400 depending upon the options you select. Many webstores offer birthing pools for sale. Check with your health insurance provider is advised, to see if they will cover the cost of the birth pool and supplies.

When considering a home birth the first thing Tami suggests is finding a midwife. Presently she knows of no licensed midwives in our area, however, there may be Oregon licensed midwives in Walla Walla or the Tri-Cities. A great place to start your search is online at cfmidwifery.org/find/#4.

The decision regarding your birthing plan is a personal and important one. Research all of your options early in pregnancy so you are prepared when delivery time arrives.

Home economist Virginia Justice holds an education degree. The Pendleton resident and her husband have two college-aged daughters.