

## **PRINT SCRIPT-Pivoting to Support Expectant Parents**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost every experience of everyday life, including one of the most important milestones – the birth of a child.

It is an especially scary time for pregnant women who worry about getting the support they need during an already challenging time. OSF HealthCare has had to pivot from in-person classes to develop other ways to make sure would-be moms and dads feel prepared.

At OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center in Galesburg, the new Family Birthing Center had to be expanded to accommodate a decision by a neighboring hospital to suspend its obstetrics service. Consequently, deliveries have surpassed 725 in the past 12 months and will outpace last year's totals.

That's a lot of would-be parents who needed to know what to expect during the birth of their child, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the three, three-hour in-person birthing classes offered every other month at the hospital.

Carolyn Tomeo, director of the Family Birthing Center, said it was important to come up with a new strategy to make sure parents still received the patient-centered support that is so important with a new baby on the way, particularly during the uncertainty of the pandemic.

**“Education is a huge part of that. We want our patients to feel prepared when they come and prepared when they take that new baby home with answers to questions and all the resources we can give them and to know that we are here for them,” according to Tomeo.**

Registered nurse and Patient Educator Coleen Martinson has a passion for helping parents get mentally and physically prepared for the birth of their child.

Martinson says she knew parents couldn't be without the education that addresses important questions about what to do leading up to delivery, what to expect during the experience, and life with a new baby. So, she devised an online version, breaking the material into three parts.

While all are valuable, she says busy would-be parents often focus on the birthing process itself.

**“What to expect once you get to the hospital although a large part of Part One tells you when to come and things to look for and I think that's important too,” she suggested.**

The class covers the important topic of birth plans. Martinson offers practical advice.

**“Don't set unrealistic expectations for your birth/labor because when you do, it sets you up to be disappointed that it didn't work the way you had planned in your mind.”**

The three-part PowerPoint series is sent to future parents with the suggestion they use the table of contents at the beginning of each of the three presentations. Martinson says that allows viewers to focus on what they want to know.

To make the content more engaging, Martinson has added media such as a virtual tour of the Family Birthing Center and video and audio clips with experts covering a variety of subjects.

**“That's why we taped the videos and put those in and recorded the audio in there to still try and give it a personal touch and not just ‘Hey, this is on-line learning,’” she explained.**

In smaller communities with fewer expectant parents, in-person birthing classes are still being held. However, in other communities within OSF HealthCare, those in-person classes were becoming less popular even before the pandemic and planning was underway to shift to an on-line option.

Martinson says before COVID-19 hit, she had to limit in-person classes to 12 couples and she broke the sessions into three, three-hour offerings. Now, there's no limit and she says people seem to like the option she's been offering since August.

**“Online, it’s unlimited participants. They can view it when they have time. They don’t have to sit down and do it all at one time; they can do a little bit as they have time,” she said.**

Expectant parents are advised to talk to their health care provider about birthing class options in their community because what's offered can vary by location.