



Inside the mobile unit, midwife Rita Rhoads provides prenatal care for Sheila Martin while midwife Valerie Peery looks on.

Birth Care Is On The Move

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Lancaster Farming Staff

QUARRYVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Birth care is a moving experience in Lancaster and Chester counties. A mobile unit on wheels travels from spot to spot to offer birth care to clients.

Launched in October by Birth Care and Family Health Services in Quarryville, the 27-foot motor home is equipped with a workstation with medical equipment, bathroom, examination room, and waiting room with a lending library.

According to Rita Rhoads, who founded the Quarryville Birth Care Center in 1978 and continues to serve as director of midwifery and nurse practitioner, the original concept of a mobile unit was to make it more convenient for Amish clientele who often live an hour's drive from medical services to receive prenatal care. Lack of transportation can result in poor or no prenatal care.

However, a surprising thing happened. In some areas such as Lititz, most clients are middle and upper-class non-Amish women, who come because they like the personal services of a midwife.

Sheila Martin fits into that category. She and her husband

Cleon are expecting their first baby in February. Although the couple live in Manheim, Sheila began traveling to the Quarryville Birth Care and Family Health Services because, she said, "I prefer the personal touch rather than a doctor who sees 50 patients a day and doesn't have time to answer my questions."

But Quarryville was a long drive from her home, and Sheila was delighted to hear that the mobile unit comes to Lititz, which is only a few miles from the Martins' home.

Patients are given a choice of birthing deliveries: home, birthing center, or hospital. Rhoads said that Birth Care and Family Health Services is the only county practice offering all three options.

"There are a few other practices in the county that offer one of the three or two of the three services but not all three options," Rhoads said.

Sheila and Cleon plan to have their baby at the birthing center in Quarryville.

"Because it's our first baby, I didn't quite trust to have the birth at home," Sheila said.

Rhoads said, "Generally we believe it's better to have first-time

babies at the center or at the hospital because it's a new experience and first-time parents are usually not as confident. In addition, since it is the first time, the mother is less inclined to know when birth is imminent and a midwife going to her residence might need to wait a day for the actual birth."

Rhoads has the distinction of establishing the first midwifery center in the state.

"Birthing centers are not intended to be high tech, because birthing is considered a normal process for pregnant women," Rhoads said. "The reason more birthing centers are not established is because they don't make a lot of money."

"The Birth Care Midwife Center is more cost effective than the services typically provided by an obstetitioner or family doctor," she said.

Most insurance plans approve of the center. Rhoads estimates that 25 percent of the patients use insurance coverage, 5-10 percent use a medical card, and the remainder are private pay patients.

It is not assumed that private pay patients cannot afford to pay full price. If it is determined that they cannot, a payment plan or a cost will be negotiated.

"We will not turn anyone away," Rhoads said.

The center holds an annual benefit auction to raise funds for patients who cannot pay.

Certified midwives must first obtained a registered nursing degree and then complete a course in midwifery, generally a three-year course.

Follow-up care is provided. When Rhoads noticed an abnormalcy in a client, she made plans immediately to send the client to a specialist.

Rhoads said that the areas targeted for mobile services are the result of clients, who have been requesting midwife services for years in those areas.

"I assumed we would rent a place, but it's not feasible to rent in so many different locations and provide equipment for each one



Pictured in front of Birth Care's mobile unit are staff members, from left, Rita Rhoads, CNM; Donna Good, LPN, Valerie Peery, CNM; Tracy Mauger, RN; Catherine Saunders, RN; Maren Ketcham, administrator; and Joyce Rohm, LPN.

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