

ICEA Position Paper

The Role and Scope of the Postpartum Doula

Position

The International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) recognizes the evolving and changing needs of the family who has just experienced the birth of a new baby. Awareness of the eleven domains of postpartum care enable the postpartum doula to facilitate and promote healthy practices. ICEA agrees with the evidence-based research which states that new families can transition through the eleven domains successfully with the assistance of a postpartum doula.

Introduction

A postpartum doula is someone who provides physical, emotional and informational support to a woman and her family during the postpartum period.

ICEA certified postpartum doulas are trained professionals who understand the individualized needs of today's families. Due to the many changes in health-care and increased internet use gaps may exist in education, competence, and family support. They also understand that new parents may not have a full understanding of what a normal postpartum period looks

like, what is normal for newborns and about how to have an empowering and successful breastfeeding experience.

The ICEA certified postpartum doula works towards filling the gaps in education, competence, family cohesion and support by providing individualized care to the mother/baby dyad and the family utilizing the Eleven Domains of Postpartum Care that promotes healthy competence, more solid family relationships, and successful postpartum outcomes.

These Eleven Domains are:

1. Emotional support
2. Physical comfort
3. Self-care
4. Infant care
5. Informational support
6. Advocacy
7. Referrals
8. Partner/father support
9. Support mother/father with infant
10. Support mother/father with sibling(s)
11. Household organization

continued on next page

Scope Of Postpartum Doula Practice

A postpartum doula works with families in the postpartum period providing them with emotional, physical and informational support.

A doula provides families with culturally appropriate emotional support to assist with the transitions of the postpartum period and having a new baby. While doing so the postpartum doula respects the parenting style of the family, provides opportunities for the mother to ask questions or express concerns, and provides encouragement.

The postpartum doula provides physical support as the family recovers and grows more comfortable with their new roles. The techniques for support should be individualized to the family's specific needs, but may include providing opportunities for rest, personal care, and healing. The doula can also demonstrate newborn care, assist with breastfeeding, provide care to older children, and be there to fill in the gaps as necessary.

The postpartum doula focuses on normal postpartum recovery and newborns, and she provides unbiased, evidence based information so the mother can make an informed decision on what is in the best interest of herself and her baby. The doula can help to facilitate communication between the mother and her care provider, and work as an advocate throughout her working relationship with the mother and family. In doing so, the doula has a comprehension of her limitations and when necessary will provide appropriate referrals to other individuals or providers.

Limitations Of Postpartum Doula Practice

An ICEA Certified Postpartum Doula should follow her scope of practice. The doula should not speak for the mother or the family, nor should she come between the mother and family and other professionals. The postpartum doula does not provide medical advice, and therefore does not provide any medical care or procedures. The postpartum doula should be knowledgeable about medical procedures that pertain to the

mother and baby so that she can provide evidence based information, but she should also know when and who to refer out to when the care needed goes beyond her scope of practice.

Doula Professional Responsibilities

The postpartum doula always presents herself as a professional and treats others (such as partners, family members, friends, and healthcare providers) with dignity and respect. In the event the doula is unable to fulfill her obligations, she will assist her client in finding a suitable replacement by referring to another doula to ensure the family has the support they need.

A postpartum doula should respect and protect the privacy of her client(s). She should not share personal or health information with others without the written consent of the client. This includes, but is not limited to verbal discussions about her clients, sharing written personal information, and sharing information or photographs on social media.

An ICEA Postpartum Doula seeking to obtain certification must attend an in-person workshop, complete the referenced reading list, and complete part one of the HUG program, obtain CPR certification and submit all certification materials within two years of enrolling in the program.

The certification program is a blend of self-study, workshop learning and a variety of competency based training practices that will educate and prepare the doula in the following areas: normal maternal physical and emotional characteristics; normal newborn characteristics, appearance and care; culturally divergent care, attachment parenting and infant soothing; the importance of touch; safety; SIDS; breastfeeding support skills; neonatal loss and grief; communication and body language; and in-home professionalism.

After certification has been obtained the Postpartum Doula will need to obtain 24 hours of continuing education every three years focusing on areas pertaining to the work she does as a postpartum doula, and submit the appropriate paperwork and fees prior to her expiration date.

continued on next page

Implications For Practice

The support a postpartum doula provides can have a lasting and important impact on the family. Postpartum support provides families with increased confidence in their new roles, a greater satisfaction in the breastfeeding experience as well as the duration, and fewer incidences of postpartum depression.

Postpartum doulas focus on “mothering the mother” by ensuring the mother receives proper nutrition, sufficient fluids, and rest so that she can heal. The doula is also a companion who can listen to the mother, provide options, resources and referrals so that there can be a reduction in feelings of anxiety, stress, and isolation.

In some cases, because of the doula’s training and knowledge, she may notice deviations from normal postpartum recovery, newborn appearance and behavior, and breastfeeding which can lead to referrals and/or treatment being provided sooner.

The postpartum doula assists the family in the postpartum period by attending to the needs of other family members, making sure they have enough attention, providing reassurance, nourishment and helps to keep an orderly house to help the entire family during their transition.

Postpartum doulas provide essential support to help families get the best possible start with their new baby.

References

- Bennett, S. S. (2015). *Beyond the Blues* (2nd ed.). Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Campbell-Voytal, K., Mccomish, J.F., Visgeer, J.M., Rowland, C.A., & Kelleher, J. (2011). Postpartum doulas: Motivations and perceptions of practice. *Midwifery*, 27(6). doi: 10.1016/j.midw.2010.09.006
- Diaz, N. (2013). *What to do when you’re having two: The twins survival guide from pregnancy through the first year*. Avery.
- Flanner, Vanesa (2015). Increasing Breastfeeding Rates: Evidence Based Strategies. *International Journal of Childbirth Education*, 30(4), 25-27
- Guerra-Reyes, L., Christie, V. M., Prabhakar, A., & Siek, K. A. (2017). Mind the Gap: Assessing the Disconnect Between Postpartum Health Information Desired and Health Information Received. *Womens Health Issues*, 27(2), 167-173. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2016.11.004
- Honikman, J. (2014). *I’m listening: A guide to supporting postpartum families* (2nd ed.).
- International Childbirth Education Association (2015) ICEA Position Paper: Cesarean Childbirth
- International Childbirth Education Association (2015) ICEA Position Paper: Infant Feeding
- Jones et al. (2016). The effect of early postnatal discharge from hospital for women and infants: a systematic review protocol. *Systematic Reviews* 5:24 DOL 10.1186/s13643-016-0193-9
- Kleiman, MSW, LCSW, K., & Davis Raskin, MD, V. (2013). *This Isn’t What I Expected Overcoming Postpartum Depression*. Da Capo Lifelong Books.
- Mallak, J. and Bailey, T. (2016). *Doulas’ Guide to Birthing Your Way*. Praeclarus Press.
- Martin, A., Horowitz, C., Balbierz, A., & Howell, E. A. (2014). Views of Women and Clinicians on Postpartum Preparation and Recovery. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 18(3), 707–713. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-013-1297-7>
- Mohrbacher, N. (2013). *Breastfeeding solutions: Quick tips for the most common nursing challenges*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Nommsen-Rivers, L. A., Mastergeorge, A. M., Hansen, R. L., Cullum, A. S., & Dewey, K. G. (2009). Doula Care, Early Breastfeeding Outcomes, and Breastfeeding Status at 6 Weeks Postpartum Among Low-Income Primiparae. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 38(2), 157-173. doi:10.1111/j.1552-6909.2009.01005.x
- Pascali-Bonaro, Debra (2014). *Nurturing Beginnings: Guide to Postpartum Care for Doulas and Community Outreach Workers*. Debra Pascali-Bonaro
- Simkin, P. (2016). *Pregnancy, childbirth, and the newborn: The complete guide* (5th ed.). Meadowbrook Press.
- Webber, S., & Simkin, P (2012) *The Gentle Art of Newborn Family Care: A Guide for Doulas and Caregivers*. Praeclarus Press.
- Wen, X., Korfmacher, J., & Hans, S. L. (2016). Change over time in young mothers engagement with a community-based doula home visiting program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 69, 116-126. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.07.023
- World Health Organization, 10 Facts on Breastfeeding, July, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/breastfeeding/en/>

By Michelle D. Hardy, MS, LMT, ICCE, ICD, ICPD, IAT