

Markita Glenn, Doula at Pettaway Pursuit Foundation

A year ago, I don't think we knew exactly what was happening when COVID-19 hit. Around this time last year COVID was hitting harder daily and life was about to change as we knew it. When we were scheduled to go on lock down back in March of 2020 we were under the impression it would last for about 6-8 weeks tops.

Understand the severity of the virus as a birth worker I feared what this would mean for families in the hospital. In the very beginning of the shut down, birth workers weren't really allowed to attend births. We were all trying to adjust to the new norm yet still provide the care that families needed. We switched up what normal doula support looked like, went virtual with visits for education and support for families, we provided virtual support for labor and delivery as some were not able to have any support.

With the community that I serve as a birth and postpartum doula and certified lactation counselor at the Pettaway Pursuit foundation it was my duty to build a strong rapport as my members were scared to give birth in what was now considered a pandemic. Being banned from the hospital was one of the hardest things to accept. I had to become very creative with how to support my families especially in labor. Some hospitals weren't even allowing phone calls or video chats. But we made it work and continue to do so!

Birth workers are essential, we are needed to help educate families about pregnancy/labor delivery and postpartum. We are an important part of labor and delivery as we provide physical support emotional support and information to the birthing person and their family. I am not a medical provider, and I know it. My job is help make this experience a positive one. Women of color are dying at a high rate. Working with a birth worker can help families understand the different changes they will go through, what to expect after delivery, what the birth rights of a birthing person are. What is considered normal and what's not normal.

Families not having access to birth workers during the pandemic has caused a lot of traumatic birthing experiences. Trauma is in the eye of the beholder; it can look different for different people. Simply not having the birth experience you desired, not being able to share the experience with your loved ones, not having adequate support all play a major role in how birthing people experience birth and recovery.

Some hospitals are now requiring doulas to show proof of certification before entering the hospital. In our line of work we don't have to be certified to do this work it's up to our families to decide if they want to hire a doula based on certification or not. I believe hospital should understand the role of a doula as an essential worker. Policies should allow families who hire a doula to be able to attend their birth as an necessity to a healthier birth outcome or provide doulas for families who would like to birth with them.

I would like to conclude with an experience I had during this pandemic. A first time mom in the early months of the pandemic was only allowed one support person during her birth, she wasn't really able to hold the phone for phone calls or video calls. I was able to provide as much support to her as possible. Over all she was thrilled with the support I was able to offer but I felt I did not do enough because she still had a traumatic birth that put her at a higher risk for postpartum depression. Her first few months of being a mommy was hard as she indeed experienced postpartum depression from the lack of support

she received in the hospital because the doula she had hired was not permitted to support her and her family!