
Lompoc Valley Medical Center's Doctors and Nurses Praise Perinatal Safety Education Initiative

100% of Clinicians Complete Advanced Practice Strategies Online Courses on Electronic Fetal Monitoring Reading, Shoulder Dystocia, Operative Vaginal Delivery, and Standardized Communications

There are many reasons why Lompoc Valley Medical Center (LVMC) would be an excellent place to give birth. Nestled between Los Padres National Forest and the Pacific Ocean, LVMC is building new obstetrical facilities specifically designed to maximize comfort by keeping mothers in the same room throughout labor, delivery, and postpartum recovery. LVMC also provides a live Baby Cam, enabling family members to view video of newborns over the Internet free of charge. Recently, LVMC was able to add to this list of boasts the full completion of one of the nation's most rigorous online education initiatives for perinatal safety. The Advanced Practice Strategies (APS) Perinatal Safety Bundle, which includes up to 20 hours of training with online courses addressing areas such as electronic fetal monitoring and analysis, managing shoulder dystocia and structured communications strategies, was launched in August 2008. By February 2009 it was completed by all physicians and nurses working in LVMC's labor and delivery department.

According to Lotta Andersson, Director of Perinatal Services at LVMC and a practicing nurse midwife in her native Sweden for over 30 years, the education program was uniformly well received. She said:

"Everybody thought the courses were excellent. It was a lot of material, but once I sat down at the computer, I found it so interesting that I wanted to

continue. It gave us time to think things through and opened our eyes to a lot of important elements of patient safety and risk."

While Ms. Andersson's staff of 13 has widely varying degrees of experience, she believed the courses were useful to clinicians at every phase of their careers—particularly those which applied to the use of standardized language developed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

"When you wake up doctors at 2 a.m. to describe a fetal strip, they should be able to 'see' the strip while you describe it," said Ms. Andersson. *"But, prior to the classes, you could have five experienced nurses describe a strip in different ways—but all mean the same thing. Now we feel very safe and secure because we're all speaking the same language."*

An Even Better OB Department

The educational initiative at LVMC was part of a comprehensive patient safety initiative spearheaded by James Raggio, LVMC's CEO. Despite LVMC's reputation for excellence in labor and delivery, Mr. Raggio viewed the program as a vital step towards continuous assessment and improvement. He said:

"I am confident the APS Perinatal Patient Safety Bundle has been of tremendous value in our efforts to constantly improve our service. Our OB department is better coordinated, the staff is more confident, and this translates to improved patient care."

According to Mr. Raggio, the safety initiative was offered by LVMC's malpractice carrier, BETA Healthcare Group (BHG). BHG authorized an OB risk assessment program that provided all their member hospitals an incentive to complete their Obstetrics' Risk Management Initiative. If hospitals demonstrate 100% compliance with all interventions, they would receive a 5% reduction in their annual malpractice premiums. The evidenced-based Risk Management Initiative requires:

- » The use of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development nomenclature for the interpretation of electronic fetal heart rate monitoring by physicians and nurses.
- » Evidence of fetal heart rate monitoring interpretation competency by physicians and nurses.
- » Collaboration between physicians and nurses evidenced by a minimum of quarterly multidisciplinary sessions of fetal monitor strip reviews.

LVMC's physicians and nurses agreed to comply with all the terms of the Risk Initiative and chose APS's Perinatal Safety Bundle to meet the first and second elements.

"[With eLearning,] active participation is necessary as individual competency can be assessed at every point. Unlike sending an entire department to listen to a speaker for a particular amount of time, there's an assurance of guaranteed take-home learning that can be customized to each particular user," said Annie Herlik, RN, JD, CPHRM, Vice President, Risk Management at BHG. "Clinicians who had a firm grasp on particular subject matters could complete the course work quickly while others could take their time to absorb the lessons. And because it's private learning, it's less stressful."

Not Just Another Initiative

Motivating clinicians to take the time out of their busy schedules to do the courses was challenging in the beginning, according to Mr. Raggio. To encourage participation, he promised to pass on LVMC's premium savings directly to the nurses and physicians working in the department. He said:

"Physicians and nurses are subjected to so many new initiatives that it's bound to get tiresome after a while. Since they were the ones who would have to follow-up on BHG's recommendations—particularly in terms of completing the courses—it seemed fair that the savings would be passed along to them directly."

Participation in online patient safety courses is an increasingly important element in patient safety training from the standpoint of risk reduction, according to Ms. Herlik from BHG. She said:

"APS's quality of content, use of graphics, and interactive learning design is the gold standard, and our feedback from clinicians has been overwhelmingly positive. Our biggest task is making sure hospitals and clinicians are aware of their access to the APS courses, because after that they really sell themselves."