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## The Value of Birth Doula Services

*What are you paying for when you hire a doula?*

### Statistics Show

How much would you pay for something that would:

- lower your chances of having a Cesarean?
- lower your need for interventions during birth?
- lower your (and your partner's) stress level during labor and delivery?
- improve your baby's condition at birth?
- improve your relationship with your partner after labor and delivery?

These are some of the research-documented\* benefits of working with a birth doula. Dr. John Kennell, who introduced the world to the benefits of using a doula, has said *"If a doula were a drug, it would be malpractice not to use it."*

### Peace of Mind

We're not accustomed to putting a price tag on such intangibles as peace of mind, relaxation, and reassurance. These are a few of the valuable emotional benefits of working with a doula. Just as important, however, is that these intangibles can lead to the tangible physical benefits listed above: fewer medical interventions and a healthier baby.

### Doula Support "Menu"

We invite you to spend some time thinking about what each of the following may be worth to you.

#### Informational Support

- Help to wade through stacks of books, pages of Web sites, and conflicting information from friends

- Figuring out what's *really* important from your childbirth classes
- Someone non-judgmental to call or e-mail with questions
- Links to current research when appropriate
- Help interpreting information from medical staff

#### Physical Support/Pain Management

- Tireless massage
- Someone to remember all those helpful positions you learned about in childbirth class -- and remind you when to try them
- Aromatherapy (if that's your thing)
- Reminders to care for yourself: rest, drink, eat
- TENS unit for non-medical pain relief

#### Emotional Support

- Feel more prepared
- An experienced companion beside you
- Deal with the unexpected
- Process challenges as they come up

#### Partner Support

- Partner can be involved to his comfort level
- Partner can rest when necessary (and be fresher for baby care afterwards)
- Partner can follow the baby if mom and baby are separated; mom still has support

#### Postpartum Support

- Breastfeeding
- Reassurance
- Listening without judgment

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## The Economics of Birth Doula Fees

*Insights to help you understand what goes into a doula's fees.*

### Hours

Couples having a first baby may imagine their doula will spend only a few hours with them during labor and birth. However, early labor may last 24 hours or more and the *average* length of first labors is about 16 hours. While we sincerely hope our clients will experience short labors, the average time spent with a woman for labor and birth is 13 hours. Doulas have supported women for up to 45 hours and more. We

spend an additional 8-10 hours in prenatal and postpartum visits, as well as another 2-5 hours in email and phone contact. Doulas also do phone and in-person interviews at no charge, adding time and transportation costs to each eventual client. The doula fee translates to an hourly rate of about \$25-30/hour for an average client, before self-employment taxes, health insurance, and other expenses. For long labors, the hourly rate can drop to as low as \$15-\$20.

\* From studies cited in *The Doula Book*, 2nd edition; Klaus, Kennell, & Klaus, Perseus Publishing, 2002

### Number of Clients

To commit to being available for your labor and birth, a doula must limit the number of clients on her calendar to avoid birth conflicts and to ensure she will be reasonably rested when you go into labor. One client per week is considered a full schedule. If most clients are first-time mothers, three per month is often a full-time workload.

When a doula accepts you as a client and puts your due date on her calendar, she also commits to being available two weeks before and two weeks after that date, to cover the normal time-frame for full-term delivery and to be available for any immediate prenatal and/or postpartum needs. This means that to schedule a one-week vacation, or to ensure that she doesn't miss her own child's birthday or a professional training she has paid for, she must take a whole month off with no clients at all (two weeks buffer on each side). Though this sometimes seem excessive, the normal window for delivery is truly unpredictable and most doulas are unwilling to risk being unavailable for the labor and delivery of a client to whom they have committed. In addition, clients and due dates sometimes come in bunches—some weeks, she may have to turn clients away and other weeks she may have no births on the calendar.

### Intangibles

A doula's fee also must cover the intangible costs of her work. The unknowns of labor and delivery often frustrate expectant parents—when, where, how, and how long? The doula's *entire career and personal life* are subject to this uncertainty. Being on-call continuously (as opposed to in regular shifts) requires a certain personality and passion, including a willingness to be called after half an hour of sleep to attend (and be fully present for) a labor for an unpredictable period of time, and possibly called again immediately. About half of first-time moms experience pre-labor that starts and stops, sometimes resulting in two or more trips by the doula to the client's home and/or hospital. Social weekend and day trips more than an hour away are not options in the month surrounding a client's due date. Dinners out, concerts, and visits with friends may be interrupted with no warning.

### Consultant Factor

The rule of thumb is that net income for self-employed professionals is *half* of what they earn after deductions for vacation and sick time, self-employment taxes, health insurance, and business expenses. A doula spends her own money on communications (business phone, pager, cell phone, and computer connection); professional expenses (training, certification, and membership in professional associations); transportation (gas and maintenance); and expenses such as marketing, printing, and office costs. The self-employment tax (15.3% of earnings) and health insurance (ranging from a few hundred dollars a month for an individual policy to a thousand or more for family coverage) represent the biggest expenses.

### Bottom Line

We sincerely wish that all insurance plans would cover professional labor support, making it available and affordable to all women. But this is not the case. While we would like our fees to be affordable for everyone, to charge less would be doing future birthing women a disservice by making labor support an underpaid profession that cannot attract or keep talented, skilled individuals.

If the expense of hiring a doula seems beyond your means, you have several options:

- discuss payment options with your doula of choice (Peninsula Birth Companions offers payment plans);
- locate a doula-in-training who may be willing to offer services at a lower fee while they gain experience and confidence;
- check to see if you can use funds from a Flexible Spending Account (FSA);
- check with your insurance company to find out if they will reimburse you for all or a portion of doula services (Peninsula Birth Companions provides the necessary documentation to apply for reimbursement).