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Women

The crucial role of healthcare providers in mitigating birth trauma

By **Dr Evita Fernandez** - December 2, 2023

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Pregnancy, labour, and childbirth constitute transformative moments for both a woman and her family. Couples navigating this journey often encounter uncertainties and apprehensions. Birth trauma, characterised by feelings of helplessness, fear, and loss of control during childbirth, can lead to significant mental health issues for the birthing mother. How can birth professionals reduce birth trauma, how can they remove apprehensions and ensure women are empowered to give birth with confidence? Let's delve into the role of healthcare professionals like obstetricians, midwives, nurses, childbirth educators and doulas in recognising, averting, and managing birth trauma effectively.

What do women want during labour and childbirth?

Women do not want granite floors or fancy interiors; no high-tech machines or music channelled through speakers. No! Women merely want kindness, respect, compassion, a clean toilet with running water, curtains to ensure privacy, a clean birthing table, the freedom to stay upright, and the freedom to walk.

Childbirth is a transformative experience, but for some women, it can be accompanied by unexpected challenges and emotional distress.

Our healthcare providers, particularly obstetricians and midwives, wield a pivotal role in identifying, preventing, and addressing birth trauma. They contribute to alleviating birth trauma in multifaceted ways, with a focus on the compassionate care provided at hospitals like ours.

Identifying risk factors

Through comprehensive prenatal assessments and **open** communication, potential risks can be identified by birthing professionals such as doctors and midwives by taking the mother's medical history, identifying pre-existing conditions, previous traumatic birth experiences, or mental health concerns that might heighten the risk of birth trauma. By understanding these factors, healthcare providers can tailor care plans to address individual needs and lessen potential sources of distress during childbirth.

Creating a supportive environment

We are ultimately influenced by the environment in which we have been nurtured and live. Environments are built by people, **individuals** with their own unique journeys and emotional quotients.

The environment during labour and delivery significantly influences the birthing experience. Obstetricians and midwives play a crucial role in fostering a supportive and empathetic environment that promotes a sense of safety and security. This involves effective communication, active listening, and involving expectant parents in decision-making processes. When teams are committed to creating a culture of compassion, they ensure that every woman feels heard and valued throughout their birthing journey.

Preventive measures to reduce birth trauma

Addressing complications with sensitivity is important. Despite meticulous planning, complications may arise during childbirth. These challenges can only be traversed with sensitivity and effective communication. Clear explanations of the situation, potential interventions, and emotional support are integral components of reducing trauma in the face of unexpected complications. What has worked well in my experience is a collaborative approach in which obstetricians, midwives, doulas and other allied specialists and couples are actively involved in decision-making while receiving the support needed to steer unforeseen circumstances.

The role of healthcare providers extends beyond the delivery room and postpartum care. They play a vital role in identifying signs of birth trauma and offering timely support. This includes providing access to counselling services, facilitating support groups, and ensuring a continuum of care that addresses the emotional well-**being** of new parents. By recognising the importance of birth trauma, healthcare providers contribute to long-term recovery and resilience. As healthcare professionals supporting birthing **women**, we must dedicate ourselves to delivering not only excellent medical care but also compassionate and empathetic support to ensure that every woman feels empowered and respected throughout the transformative journey of childbirth.

Dr Evita Fernandez, Chairperson and Managing Director, Fernandez Foundation

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**Dr Evita Fernandez**