



Maternity Center Association

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April 21, 2005

The Honorable Michael Enzi, Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Enzi:

As Executive Director of Maternity Center Association (MCA), I am writing to request that the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee hold a hearing to explore the increasingly high rate of cesarean sections performed in the U.S. and how this impacts the short- and long-term health of women and babies and the cost of obstetrical care. MCA is the oldest national U.S. organization advocating on behalf of childbearing women and families. Our mission is to promote safe, effective and satisfying maternity care for all women and their families through research, education and advocacy.

Approximately three women in 10 in the U.S. now give birth by major abdominal surgery, a new record high. At the same time, the rate of vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) is steadily decreasing as more and more hospitals and physicians refuse to offer VBAC on the grounds that it is riskier than a planned cesarean.

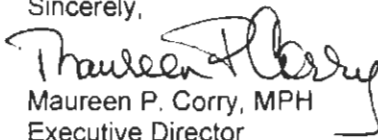
In late 2003, out of deep concern that belief, policy and practice were shifting rapidly and driving cesarean rates up and VBAC rates down without the benefit of a systematic look at the best evidence, MCA undertook a comprehensive review of the best available research studies to compare risks for mothers and babies of cesarean versus vaginal birth. Results of the review were released in April 2004 at a media forum at the New York Academy of Medicine. Overall results found that without clear, compelling medical reasons for a cesarean, a vaginal birth that minimizes the use of interventions that may be harmful to mothers and babies is the safest way to give birth.

MCA believes it is essential that consumers, providers, payers and policymakers get answers to important questions such as: Why is the cesarean rate increasing dramatically and access to VBAC declining? What forces are at play? What is the impact on mothers and babies? Are we headed in the right direction or must we take action to reverse these trends? What are the associated costs and the impact on obstetrical care of women?

MCA strongly urges the Committee to schedule a hearing as soon as possible to explore these and other questions regarding the quality of obstetrical care in the U.S. Action is needed now to address the nations' rising cesarean section rate and the impact on women's health and the overall health care system.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions or need additional information at 212 777-5000, ext. 4. Should you decide to hold a hearing, MCA would be pleased to offer experts to testify on the best research and mothers to share their experiences.

Sincerely,


Maureen P. Corry, MPH
Executive Director

Celebrating 85 Years of Innovations in Maternity Care