

Understanding Models of Care

The Medical Model of Care

The medical model views pregnancy and birth primarily through a clinical lens. Pregnancy is monitored closely for complications, and interventions are used when providers believe they will improve outcomes, sometimes even when the evidence says differently. Obstetricians are specially trained to identify and treat medical complications, perform surgery, and care for high-risk pregnancies. The medical model can be lifesaving when complications arise. However, depending on the setting, some families may experience shorter appointments, less continuity of care, or greater use of interventions.

Strengths

- Excellent for high-risk pregnancies
- Specialized expertise
- Advanced medical technology
- Diagnosis and Management of complex conditions
- Easy access to surgery and emergency care



The Midwifery Model of Care

The midwifery model recognizes pregnancy and birth as normal, physiologic life events for most healthy people while watching for and working to prevent complications that would require medical intervention. Midwives emphasize education, prevention, informed decision-making, individualized care, and building trusting relationships with clients and their families. Midwives consult with or transfer care to physicians including Maternal Fetal Medicine, and pediatricians whenever complications that require a higher level of medical expertise arise.

Strengths

- Longer appointments
- Greater emphasis on education
- Shared decision-making
- Continuity of care
- Personalized support
- Focus on physiologic birth when appropriate
- Family-centered care
- Midwives support births in hospital or when appropriate, in out-of-hospital settings

Things to Know

Every pregnancy is unique. Some people appreciate highly medicalized care, while others prefer a more relationship-centered approach when their pregnancy is healthy. Excellent maternity care can exist in hospitals, birth centers, and home birth settings when providers practice evidence-based, respectful, patient-centered care.