



Making the Case for a Physiologic Approach to Childbirth

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ABSTRACT

In this column, *Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach* by Henci Goer and Amy Romano is reviewed. The book presents compelling evidence for the value and importance of a physiological approach to childbirth and provides a clear, exhaustive guide for making sense of the research in the context of the current maternity care system. The book is an invaluable resource for navigating the maze of contemporary obstetrics for both health-care professionals and childbearing families.

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Childbirth educators, nurses, midwives, obstetricians, and childbearing women have a choice when it comes to birth: following the status quo of medical management of birth or opting for the physiologic approach to birth. The second option involves navigating the maze of modern obstetrics. *Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach* makes it easier to navigate that maze. Goer and Romano (2012) untangle the vast web of information about medical and physiologic birth and in doing so have made a major contribution to the birth literature.

Both Goer and Romano are strong advocates for normal, physiologic birth and are accomplished writers and thinkers. Goer's (1995) *Obstetric Myths Versus Research Realities: A Guide to the Medical Literature* provided direction almost two decades ago to those of us "in the trenches" concerned with the medicalization of birth and trying to make sense of the childbirth research. *The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better*

Birth (Goer, 1999) raised the standard for childbirth books by clearly and succinctly presenting the research and helping women make sense of it. Both Goer and Romano made major contributions to the Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (2007) systematic review, *Evidence Basis for the Ten Steps of Mother-Friendly Care*. Romano not only knows research but she brings the important clinical perspective of a certified nurse-midwife. In addition to her clinical work as a home-birth midwife, Romano has worked with Lamaze International in several capacities over the last decade, including developing the award-winning *Science and Sensibility* blog and writing a regular column for the *The Journal of Perinatal Education*. Goer's Ask Henci forum is a regular feature on the Lamaze International website.

In *Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach*, Goer and Romano competently walk the reader through the complex

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maze of obstetric research, ultimately increasing our understanding not just of the research but of the implications of that research for the optimal care of mothers and babies.

AN INSIDE LOOK

Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach is not a “in a nutshell” book. It is almost 500 pages long. However, it is not a book that needs to be, nor is it intended to be, read in one sitting. Most of us will read the book a chapter at a time depending on what issue we need to know more about. The clarity of the writing, the occasional use of humor, and the frequent use of analogy make the reading of the often complex discussions of the research less challenging and much more interesting than you might imagine.

Context

The first two chapters place the research in the context of contemporary maternity care, highlighting the differences between the medical and physiologic views of birth, the limitations of medical-model research, and concerns about the best way to conduct research related to birth. Goer and Romano (2012) are clear about their own values and beliefs related to birth. Their goal, after critically appraising the research, is to make the case for a physiologic approach to birth.

The third chapter provides a detailed description of the organization of the book. Each subsequent chapter includes an essay, guidelines for optimal care, and a mini review of the research. The essay describes the cultural and historical underpinnings of the issue, the gaps in the evidence, the gaps between evidence and practice, and then a discussion on why this might be so. The guidelines for optimal care are thorough, clear, and evidence based.


Methodology for the Mini Reviews

The data sources for the mini reviews are described in Chapter 3. Each mini review includes inclusion and exclusion criteria and the limitations and weaknesses of each research study are identified. The detailed discussion of the methodology including identifying author bias demonstrates a commitment to rigor. The transparency related to methodology is refreshing and rarely described in such detail. This enhances the credibility of the book.

In *Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach*, Goer and Romano competently walk the reader through the complex maze of obstetric research, ultimately increasing our understanding not just of the research but of the implications of that research for the optimal care of mothers and babies.

Content

Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach covers just about every issue central to our work as childbirth educators, nurses, doulas, midwives, and obstetricians. There are three chapters related to cesarean including vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) and maternal request cesarean. Other chapters cover induction of labor, augmentation of labor, electronic fetal monitoring, intravenous versus oral intake in labor, epidurals, management of second and third stages of labor, newborn practices including the timing of cord clamping, supportive care in labor, place of birth including birth homes and home birth, and midwife-led care.

 *Optimal Care in Childbirth: The Case for a Physiologic Approach can be purchased at <http://www.optimalcareinchildbirth.com/>*

A “MUST HAVE” RESOURCE

This long awaited book is a marvel. It is a “must have” resource not just for childbirth educators, nurses, obstetricians, and women but for hospital administrators, insurance companies, and policymakers. It is also an invaluable resource for childbearing women as they, too, navigate the maze of modern obstetrics and maternity care and make decisions for themselves and their babies.

Goer and Romano have certainly made a compelling case for a physiologic approach to birth. It is an invaluable resource for all of us committed to changing the culture of birth.

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