



Women's Care: Leading Voices from the Front Lines

*Selected stories from recipients of the 2020
Healthgrades Women's Care Excellence Awards*

HEALTHGRADES UNDERSTANDS that hospitals have faced extraordinary circumstances in recent months and we salute all hospitals and health systems for their remarkable patient care efforts. We asked several recipients of a 2020 Women's Care Award to share their experience and reflect on their efforts to provide high quality care for women and their families. They also discussed how they have managed to adapt during the COVID-19 crisis and provide a safe place for women to deliver their babies or receive critical treatment.



Clara Maass Medical Center

Part of RWJBarnabas Health, Clara Maass Medical Center is a 469-bed hospital in Belleville, NJ, outside of Newark. The hospital has received the Healthgrades Labor and Delivery Excellence Award and Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence Award for five consecutive years. For 2020, Clara Maass is in the top 5% in the nation for both awards.

Women choose to have their baby at Clara Maass based on the hospital's reputation for high-quality care, but also for the tight-knit community. Patients labor, deliver, and recover in one of six newly renovated suites, and complicated deliveries and C-sections are handled in two dedicated ORs. Premature newborns born at 32 weeks or greater are cared for in a Level II special care nursery, which offers families the ability to interact with their infants via remote livestream.

Michael Straker, MD, FACOG, is a physician in private practice who has served as Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Clara Maass since 2009. During medical school he intended to go into family medicine but fell in love with obstetrics and gynecology during his third year of medical school.

"It's a well-rounded field with the ability to treat various medical conditions and perform surgeries. The unique ability to deliver babies sets obstetrics apart from other specialties," says Straker. "I'm

driven by the satisfaction of achieving great outcomes, the joy of bringing new life into the world, and the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with my patients."

Clara Maass' patient population is diverse. The hospital is sensitive to those who are affected by disparities in income and housing, those who may lack healthcare insurance, and those who face other barriers that affect their health status.

"These conditions are challenging for both the patient and provider," says Straker. "However, we have an obstetrics service within our health and wellness center that provides great prenatal care that can mitigate risk, and our team is experienced with helping mothers who may not have had access to prenatal care."

Uniform pandemic standards

When the coronavirus hit the tri-state area, department chairs at Clara Maass began holding twice-weekly conference calls to learn how the individual departments were being affected, with the common goal of supporting each other during the crisis. "In some instances, it seemed as if we were 'flying the plane and building it at the same time', with everyone's input but learning how to battle COVID-19 along the way."

"Some of these protocols may seem strict, but we're all working within proposed CDC guidelines toward the same end goal: to keep our patients and



“ We’re hoping to avoid individual hospitals being overwhelmed. We’re not competitors in this [pandemic]. We’re all in the same boat trying to get through. ”

Michael Straker, MD, FACOG

Chairman, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
Clara Maass Medical Center

staff safe. In New Jersey, we have a weekly call for all OB chairs to achieve uniform standards during the pandemic. For example, one hospital can't allow two partners while another allows only one. We're not competitors, we're all in the same boat trying to get through."

One challenge providers in every field must overcome is people who are afraid to come back to the hospital. "One of my patients came into my office with vaginal bleeding. I had to convince her to go to the hospital by explaining all of the measures that we've implemented to keep everyone safe. If I could say anything to people who are putting off care, it would be, 'Your healthcare is too important. Postponing or failing to address major medical issues may allow them to worsen and may end in catastrophic results.'"

Englewood Health

Englewood Health is one of New Jersey's leading hospitals and healthcare networks. Since 2016, the hospital has ranked in the top 10% in the nation for outcomes for delivering mothers. This year it has moved up to the top 5%. Since 2016, Englewood has also been a Healthgrades 5-star recipient for both Vaginal Delivery and C-Section delivery, and has also received the Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence Award.

The Family Birth Place at Englewood Hospital includes 21 private and 3 semi-private mother/baby rooms, two dedicated operating rooms for C-sections, and a Level III NICU that treats premature babies from 28 weeks on. More than 2,500 mothers give birth at Englewood each year.

For several weeks in July, the Family Birth Place experienced an influx of deliveries and the hospital had to open satellite maternity beds. The surge was especially challenging not just because of COVID-19, but because the births included *five sets of twins* — on the heels of two sets of twins born in June.

"The multiple births drew lots of attention," says Valerie French, MBA, BSN, RNC-LRN, Director of Nursing, Maternal-Child Health at Englewood Health. "It was something so joyous during these trying times."

French's team includes a mix of experienced nurses who have been doing this work a long time and new, enthusiastic nurses, including new graduates.

"When I started my nursing career, I knew I wanted to work in obstetrics and was lucky to get a position in maternal-child health right away. It helped that I had a good mentor," says French. "Several years ago when there was an increased need for obstetrical RNs, we decided we needed to start bringing in and educating new graduates. Recruiting top candidates and providing support and mentorship to both new graduates and other obstetric nurses ensures that we have a consistently strong team."

"The leadership team at Englewood Health has been very receptive to our needs and has always been supportive," says French. "A key example involved working with our department chief to set goals to boost our outcomes. We recognized that to succeed, we needed to involve nursing staff to meet those goals. One opportunity for us was to reduce early elective deliveries. As we began to review the data, it became obvious that our practice was correct but our documentation didn't reflect what was actually happening." An interdisciplinary approach among the physicians, nurses, and other team members was used to monitor the cases and share information to make the necessary documentation improvements. Since March of 2017 when this plan was implemented, Englewood Health has achieved 100% compliance and has no early elective deliveries.

Everything they need to care for patients

During the pandemic, Englewood Health provided the same high level of care that they always do.



“The seven sets of twins drew lots of attention. It was something so joyous during these trying times.”

Valerie French, MBA, BSN, RNC-LRN

Director of Nursing, Maternal-Child Health
Englewood Health

They tested each patient, and thankfully less than 5% of moms were COVID-19 positive. Even fewer were symptomatic.

As much as protocols and PPE have made a difference, so have communication and compassion. "To make sure your staff can provide the best care possible during this public health crisis, conduct huddles during every shift that keep everyone informed," says French, "And allow for, and promote, work-life balance."

Garnet Health

Garnet Health is a three-hospital system that serves nearly 450,000 residents in New York's mid-Hudson and Catskills region. Garnet Health Medical Center in Middletown is the only hospital in New York to receive all three Healthgrades Women's Care Excellence Awards for two years in a row.

The Rowley Family Birthing Center at Garnet Health Medical Center is a locked unit designed for mothers and families who want to have their baby in a comfortable, home-like setting. Moms choose to give birth there because the center is known for providing excellent care. Physicians, nurses, and support staff care for each mom's whole family and encourages them to participate.

Close alignment between physicians and nurses also accounts for the excellent care. Physician and nursing leaders spend hours reviewing quality metrics, hashing out problems, and arriving at cohesive ideas on how to provide care. The bond and ideals shared by Dumisa Adams, MD, FACOG, Obstetrics and Gynecology for Garnet Health Doctors, and Veronica Jackson, RNC, BSN, MHA, Nursing Services Administrator for Women and Children's Services at Garnet Health Medical Center, reflects the passion and dedication families experience at the Rowley Family Birthing Center.

Adams' mother was a midwife, and she saw her first complicated C-section when she was three

years old. She has been an OBGYN for 20 years. In that time, she's seen the age of first birth rise from the early 20s to early 30s. She's also seen new moms become more educated about their options and want to know which are viable under different circumstances. Often, new moms want to control outcomes, but there are many outcomes to consider with labor and delivery.

"We have to temper what moms *want* to happen with what *may* happen so they're relatively comfortable if things change course. We're dealing with a variable — a baby — who has its own idea about how things should go for itself. And Mom and Dad will be dealing with that unique new being for the rest of its life."

An accomplished surgeon, Adams also performs many gynecological surgeries and procedures. "Women's care is a continuum. When you go into OBGYN you do GYN, too. This specialty is a gift that keeps on giving. It lets me use my brain in multiple ways to advocate for women."

Jackson knew she wanted to work in OB since nursing school. "When I got to my first OB unit, I saw new life and fell in love with taking care of an unknown patient."

She views labor and delivery through the nurse's lens. "Unlike physicians, OB nurses don't see the moms in their prenatal condition. We are learning who they are in the moment, thinking about what we need to do to

Garnet Health MEDICAL CENTER

"We're dealing with a variable — a baby — who has its own idea about how things should go for itself. And Mom and Dad will be dealing with that unique new being for the rest of its life."

Dumisa Adams, MD, FACOG

Obstetrics and Gynecology, Garnet Health Doctors

keep mom and baby safe, such as administering the proper medications and preventing hemorrhaging. Meanwhile, we're trying to make sure the laboring mom understands what's going on."

Indispensable support from partners

When COVID-19 arrived, New York issued state mandates to ensure patients and families would be safe, but also allowed for different protocols. The Rowley Family Birthing Center chose to allow the partner of any laboring mom to stay through the birth and recovery, but they couldn't leave and come back. Most chose to stay and follow the rules. Especially during labor, that support was indispensable, because staff couldn't stay with each patient the entire time. Unfortunately, grandmothers and other family members couldn't visit, but at least mom had a partner.

Good Samaritan Medical Center

Good Samaritan Medical Center is a 333-bed facility in West Palm Beach, FL. For three years in a row (2018-2020), they have been a recipient of the Healthgrades Labor and Delivery Excellence Award and are among the top 10% of hospitals evaluated for Labor and Delivery. For six years in a row, they have been a Five-Star recipient for Vaginal Delivery.

Women who deliver at Good Samaritan choose the hospital because of their reputation for superior outcomes, high patient satisfaction scores, and personalized care. In the Labor/Delivery/Recovery/Postpartum suite, each mother has one nurse providing care throughout her entire labor and recovery. Skin to skin is promoted to facilitate bonding for both vaginal deliveries and cesarean sections. Family-centered care is encouraged to include the support person even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For potential high-risk deliveries or the unexpected preterm delivery, the hospital has a Level II NICU. A neonatologist and NICU nurses are in-house 24/7. For post-discharge care, Good Samaritan has a partnership with the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Palm Beach County and other resources.

As a NICU nurse, Director of OB Services Eileen Forgatch understands how important a great labor nurse can be for mothers. "The love and care our

doctors and nurses provide for their patients is amazing. It's an honor to work in a field where you watch families grow and to be a part of that special occasion," says Forgatch. "Most of our deliveries are repeat patients. It's amazing for these families to be able to deliver in the same room with the same nurse as their first baby. It really gives us a sense of community seeing these parents and their families growing year after year."

One of the primary challenges Good Samaritan faces is women coming in expecting the "perfect" birth. "Having one-on-one nursing care helps put moms' minds at ease and alleviate stress if situations arise that they can't control," says Forgatch. "Often, when an emergency arises, women who have planned every detail feel like they have done something wrong. The nurses provide much-needed support and care."

COVID-19 precautions

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, all scheduled C-sections and inductions are tested during pre-admission appointments. Walk-ins or moms who go into labor before their results come back receive rapid testing to ensure all OB patients are screened and their COVID-19 status is known before their delivery. "Even if a mom is COVID-19 positive, we allow her a support person during labor because we understand how necessary that support is," says Forgatch. Good Samaritan Labor and Delivery has two negative pressure delivery rooms



“ Most of our deliveries are repeat patients. It really gives us a sense of community seeing these parents and their families growing year after year. ”

Eileen Forgatch

Director of OB Services
Good Samaritan Medical Center

and a negative pressure OR should the mother require a C-section. Each negative pressure room is equipped with an isolette. If mom is asymptomatic, mom and baby can stay safely in the same room using the isolette. If mom is symptomatic and unable to care for her baby, options range from newborn to NICU care.

In one instance, the pandemic was a blessing in disguise. Leading up to an adoption, the adoptive mom and birth mom agreed that it was important for the two of them to be together during the birth. "Being able to have the adoptive mom present for the birth not only provided support for the birth mom but also facilitated bonding for her and her new baby."

Hackensack Meridian JFK Medical Center

Mothers choose to have their babies at Hackensack Meridian JFK Medical Center for their exceptional outcomes, which keeps moms coming back as their families grow. Behind those outcomes is clear, frequent communication. Each shift, on-duty physicians huddle with clinicians from the nursing, anesthesia, and neonatal departments to discuss cases of concern. Aligning the team is essential to sustaining excellence. Patient care and communication is provider to provider.

"I've been all over the New York tri-state area and haven't seen the same cohesion. Five brains are better than one," says Sharareh Bagherian, DO, an OBGYN specialist at JFK Medical Center.

So is the inclusion of midwives on the team. When Bagherian started practicing at JFK Medical Center, there were no midwives. She got involved in recruiting midwives full time and part time, and C-section rates dropped with midwives' management of low risk pregnancies. "Mothers are more relaxed once they know a team of midwives and physicians are taking care of them.

To maintain excellence, JFK Medical Center puts new physicians and midwives through shadowing and proctoring. Midwives complete an average of three months of credentialing. "We keep reinforcing best practices until they become instinct," says Bagherian.

Mothers over 40 are considered to be at higher risk of complications, especially if they go past their due date. They receive fetal genetic testing and their pregnancies are monitored closely. If indicated, and under guidance of a maternal-fetal medicine specialist, they are scheduled to have induced labor.

The hospital also offers 24-hour GYN consulting services, which are key to providing urgent gynecologic services and resources for cancer screening.

A cultural melting pot

Located about 25 miles outside of Newark, Edison Township is a cultural melting pot. To accommodate its large immigrant population, the hospital has automated translators that are activated by picking a language and pressing a button to summon a live remote translator.

Many patients are seen at one of two Federally Qualified Health Clinics affiliated with JFK Medical Center, which see patients in-person and via telehealth, since COVID-19 cases peaked in March. They often don't get regular checkups and aren't aware of the resources available to them. Bagherian helps clinic midwives manage high-risk pregnancies, including teens with social issues. Staff support these young mothers through their adjustment to caring for a newborn.



**Hackensack Meridian
JFK Medical Center**

“ We keep reinforcing best practices until they become instinct. ”

Sharareh Bagherian, DO

OBGYN Specialist
Hackensack Meridian JFK Medical Center

Boosting spirits during COVID-19

Since JFK Medical Center started doing its own rapid testing for COVID-19, cases have fallen below 10%. Testing and daily training are still critical. At the outset they did special drills to be prepared for situations like a COVID-19 positive mother needing an emergency C-section.

"It was like we were at war — against COVID-19," says Bagherian. "We had to call staff and boost their spirits, because they were also dealing with a lot at home. We still have to protect them and our patients.

"I tell them, 'Have faith in the protocols and screenings, and use protective gear correctly.' Staff and patients don't see an endpoint. I emphasize the positive. We're making new tests and working on vaccines. But until we have a vaccine, we've got to be on our toes."

HCA Healthcare (St. David's HealthCare)

Devin Garza, MD, FACOG, is a gynecological surgeon and Director of Minimally Invasive Surgery at St. David's North Austin Medical Center, a 437-bed, multi-specialty, acute care facility dedicated to women's health services, including maternity and newborn care with Level I, II and III nurseries at the adjacent St. David's Women's Center of Texas. St. David's North Austin Medical Center is a recipient of all three Healthgrades Women's Care Excellence Awards — the Gynecologic Surgery Excellence Award, Labor and Delivery Excellence Award, and Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence Award for the last three years (2018 - 2020).

Women choose St. David's North Austin Medical Center to have gynecologic surgery or to deliver their babies because of the hospital's excellent outcomes and reputation for great care. Dr. Garza attributes their high patient volume to many factors, including the character of the hospital and its staff, and to physicians coming together to create synergy.

"It's not just physicians. We couldn't provide great outcomes without the support staff, such as nursing and administration," says Garza. "When everyone collaborates to form this synergy, the result is going to be a happy patient."

St. David's HealthCare's robotic platforms are best-in-class, and familiarity with these platforms translates from the surgeons, to supporting teams, to everyone who interacts with a patient from the

front door to the OR. For every patient, the care team reviews key touchpoints and discusses how to improve the patient experience. Within that framework, they determine next steps based on feedback.

"Having a framework that you can actually work on based on patient feedback is something to be proven to drive patient satisfaction," says Garza. "We're always trying to set the bar higher regarding patient satisfaction."

"The directors and managers of the hospital — they're mothers, they're patients and they're primarily women. Being empathetic to the needs of women, their families, their spouses or partners, and being able to translate that into the patient experience helps us understand how patients want to be treated."

About 70% of St David's North Austin Medical Center's gynecological surgery patients travel more than three hours to be treated there. They come from all over to explore minimally invasive approaches, including robotics, that are proven to lessen recovery time and minimize pain.

Helping surgical patients feel safe

Another asset for St. David's HealthCare is that they are a part of the HCA Healthcare hospital system. HCA Healthcare has resources allocated from across the country. Their ability to be on top of testing and best practices during COVID-19 means that patients can feel safe at St. David's HealthCare facilities.

StDavid's HEALTHCARE

“ Being empathetic to a woman's needs, a family's needs, the spouse's or the partner's needs, and being able to translate that into the patient experience helps us understand how patients want to be treated. ”

Devin M. Garza, MD, FACOG

Director of Minimally Invasive Surgery at St. David's North Austin Medical Center and St. David's Surgical Hospital

Says Garza, "HCA is so far out front. They got out in front of safe protocols, including rapid COVID-19 testing, making it safer for doctors to do surgery and limiting the time that we were unable to perform indicated surgical procedures."

St. David's HealthCare is also innovating with telemedicine during the COVID-19 crisis. While some patients have required in-person visits, others have adopted telemedicine. Garza says telemedicine is better than he expected. "Telemedicine has given people a sense of 'me coming to them' instead of them coming to me. Patients are more comfortable in their own homes and I can continue to educate them and share available options for care." He intends on continuing telemedicine for patients who do not require physical visits.

Overlake Medical Center & Clinics

Overlake Medical Center & Clinics is a 349-bed community hospital in Bellevue, WA, about 10 miles north of Seattle. It is the only Washington State hospital to receive the Healthgrades Gynecologic Surgery Excellence Award three years in a row.

Pamela Paley, MD, has been a gynecologic oncology surgeon since 1997. While in private practice in 2003, she began performing a small fraction of surgeries and procedures at Overlake. As the region's population boomed, so did Bellevue. When the hospital opened a new cancer center in 2017, Paley moved to Overlake full-time.

"Seventeen years ago I never would have believed I could practice full-time at Overlake and be this busy. Now I'm hiring another physician assistant and, hopefully, another gynecologic oncologist soon," says Paley. "The hospital has a tremendously positive reputation in the Puget Sound region. It has served the community since 1960 and brings in world-class providers. Employee and provider turnover is very low."

Support along the journey

The cancer center has an engaged team of social workers who get involved in each cancer patient's care, including gynecologic cancer patients. As soon as new patients walk in the door, they complete an emotional distress screening. That same day, the social worker determines what kind of support they need. After their initial consultation, the

social worker meets with them to review available resources — transportation, counseling, interpreters if they don't speak English — whatever they need. These services are critical for people who don't have a good social support system and may not feel confident communicating with their provider. Overlake also has nurse navigators for all cancer patients to ensure that when the patients enter the system they immediately have an advocate and single point of contact.

In addition to treatment, gynecologic cancer patients must come to terms with potential outcomes, from the inability to have children to pelvic floor and incontinence issues.

Showing the way

The Seattle area was the first location in the U.S. to be hit hard by COVID-19. "Keeping patients, staff, and providers safe is the top concern for our clinical leaders, administrators, and infection team," says Paley. "In February when it became obvious that we were facing a public health crisis, they established an incident command center. More than daily they shared concise communications with employees, staff, and providers, including what we needed to do to keep ourselves and our patients safe."

As soon as possible, the hospital launched an in-house molecular lab to allow quick access to Covid-testing for staff, pre-surgery patients, and pre-labor patients. Based on results, clinicians know what care

OVERLAKE | MEDICAL CENTER & CLINICS

“Seventeen years ago I never would have believed I could practice full-time at Overlake and be this busy. Now I'm hiring another physician assistant and, hopefully, another gynecologic oncologist soon.”

Pamela Paley, MD

Gynecological Oncology, Overlake Medical Center

path the patient should go through to conserve PPE resources. COVID-19 areas (ED, urgent care, ICU) were separated from non-COVID areas. Because of these measures, Overlake has had extremely low positivity rates.

"I can't say enough about how the leadership team made things run smoothly. I never felt in the dark about why we were doing what we were doing," says Paley. "This was my first experience with a global and local healthcare crisis. The response to COVID-19 helped us understand the importance of sharing best practices for surgical services during any kind of disaster."

Riverside Medical Center

Riverside Medical Center is a 300-bed Level II Trauma hospital located in Kankakee, IL, and is part of Riverside Healthcare, a fully integrated healthcare system serving five Illinois counties including Kankakee, Iroquois, Livingston, Will, Grundy and parts of Western Indiana. They are the only hospital in Illinois to receive the Labor and Delivery Excellence Award, named in the top 10% for Labor and Delivery. Riverside is also a Healthgrades 5-star recipient for both Vaginal Delivery and C-Section Delivery, as well as Gynecologic Procedures.

Women choose to have their babies at Riverside in part because of their partnership with the University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital. It gives mothers peace of mind to know there is an in-house pediatric hospitalist on-site 24/7. Patients can also see maternal-fetal specialists if something unexpected arises during their pregnancy. Currently, Riverside employs five OBGYNs and continues to strengthen its program to provide better care for their community.

"We focus on customer service and patient satisfaction, and our OBs do a fantastic job across the board," says CEO Phillip Kambic.

Addressing complex social and medical problems

Riverside is a Medicare Disproportionate Share Hospital with a higher number of disadvantaged moms. It's more difficult to ensure they are receiving prenatal care, which can increase complexity.

To address these challenges, Riverside partners with the Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative and is involved in their maternal hypertensive and maternal opioid crisis initiatives. In addition, they operate free primary care clinics in underserved areas that connect moms with OBs and get them caught up on prenatal care. These programs reduce anxiety for moms and offer them resources they weren't able to find elsewhere.

"The emergency room and the labor and delivery department are excellent about making sure patients who present without prenatal care get into Riverside Medical Group to see physicians who can get them on the right track and caught up," says Dawn Willbarger, Vice President of Riverside Medical Group.

Ensuring safety during COVID-19

To help keep moms safe during COVID-19, Riverside began rewriting their procedures in the early stages of the crisis and educated staff on how to answer questions. "Like most hospitals in Illinois, we are currently doing COVID testing for C-sections or scheduled deliveries at least 48 hours in advance with a next-day turnaround. For those who are emergent or can't wait, Riverside also has rapid testing available, so every patient knows as she comes in what their COVID-19 status is," says Kambic. Riverside currently allows one primary visitor to accompany the mom during labor and delivery, but he or she must remain there for the duration of the mom's stay.



"We hold our OBs to a high standard. We are very focused on quality of care and ease of access."

Phillip Kambic

CEO

Riverside Medical Center

Kambic also emphasizes the widespread testing at Riverside. "One of the precautions we put in place is to test all moms and staff members, so we had a great baseline of everyone who came into contact with a patient. We knew we had a clean slate and we promoted that as part of a major marketing campaign called 'Riverside Safe.' Patients really appreciated that and felt comfortable with the plan.

"For Riverside to earn the trust of our patients and community, we have to deliver great quality of care all the time, not part of the time or most of the time."

St. Mary's Medical Center

St. Mary's Medical Center is a 460-bed acute care hospital in West Palm Beach, FL, that is part of the Tenet Healthcare system. The St. Mary's Birthplace features all private rooms and boasts a 45-bed Level III NICU. For three years in a row (2018-2020), they have been a recipient of the Healthgrades Labor and Delivery Excellence Award and are among the top 10% of hospitals evaluated for Labor and Delivery. For six years in a row, they have been a Five-Star Recipient for Vaginal Delivery and a Five-Star Recipient for C-Section Delivery.

Chief Nursing Officer Ruth Schwarzkopf believes that in addition to the comfortable setting, the highly experienced staff has a lot to do with why women choose to have their babies at St. Mary's. "We make your delivery the best experience for you with highly skilled staff who are ready to respond to anything that comes up."

St. Mary's is also a regional perinatal intensive care center, so they often treat high-risk patients. "We serve mothers who are high risk and who present with comorbidities and other risks associated with pregnancy," says Schwarzkopf. "We also care for newborns who could be low birth weight or born with illnesses that are identified prenatally." In addition, St. Mary's has obstetricians, anesthesiologists, and neonatologists on staff 24/7.

To overcome the many challenges of OB care and ensure that St. Mary's provides the best outcomes,

Schwarzkopf says you have to have a script and stick to it. "One of the biggest challenges we've seen in the past few years involves 'Dr. Google.' Patients come in having researched issues on the internet and want to dictate their own care instead of relying on the advice of hospital experts." To address those challenges, Schwarzkopf says they do their best to help new parents create individualized birth plans. "Everyone wants a different experience, so we try to accommodate that as much as possible."

As CNO, Schwarzkopf is involved in every service line but holds a special place in her heart for OB. "You can never get over the feeling of seeing a newborn baby. Even if you're having the worst day ever, you can just walk through OB and see families with their new babies and life is good."

Keeping patients safe

Florida has become one of the states most impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks. St. Mary's has adapted to provide in-depth one-on-one phone conversations in lieu of in-person tours and has worked hard to communicate safety policies and procedures to mothers and partners once they are registered to deliver at the hospital. These policies include a separate OB triage emergency department area for moms who need to come in for a labor check or other testing. In addition, the hospital is working hard to ensure moms receive most of their education before coming into the hospital.



“ We have an individualized birth plan for every patient, because everyone wants a different experience, so we try to accommodate that as much as possible. ”

Ruth Schwarzkopf

Chief Nursing Officer
St. Mary's Medical Center

To ensure the safety of all patients, St. Mary's tests all patients with rapid COVID-19 tests and allows one support person per mother. They also have a separate unit with negative pressure rooms for COVID-19-positive moms. These moms come in, deliver, and recover in the same room for their entire stay. Non-COVID-19 moms can move between labor rooms and postpartum rooms.

West Boca Medical Center

West Boca Medical Center is a 195-bed acute care hospital in Boca Raton, FL. For six years in a row, the hospital has been a Healthgrades Five-Star Recipient for Vaginal Delivery and C-Section Delivery.

One of the reasons women choose to have their babies at West Boca is because of the Level III NICU. "We see patients who travel far to have their babies at West Boca because they are worried about potential issues or complications and want to have a safe place to deliver," says Christine Edwards, MD, a maternal-fetal-medicine specialist at West Boca.

Most patients in the area are healthier and start prenatal care as soon as they discover that they're pregnant. However, West Boca is seeing increased obesity, which can lead to high-risk pregnancy concerns such as hypertension and diabetes. In addition, they have seen more patients who are of advanced maternal age, which can lead to complications with pregnancy. To meet the needs of these patients, West Boca has maternal-fetal-medicine specialists on staff who focus on high-risk pregnancies. Physicians at West Boca now recommend that higher-risk patients see their obstetrician as well as the maternal-fetal-medicine specialists leading up to their pregnancy.

Edwards found her way into maternal-fetal-medicine after studying obstetrics and gynecology in medical school and falling in love with it.

"The majority of the time, it's a happy field. I sit down with my patients and get to provide the care that helps these families grow," says Edwards. "I also enjoy providing care to women regarding their overall health. Often we're just focused on physical health, but emotional health and mental health are extremely important as well."

West Boca is located near the county line between Palm Beach and Broward counties, which together have the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Florida after Miami-Dade. To manage COVID-19 concerns, the hospital must reassure patients when they come in that they're being taken care of and will not be exposed to the virus. All admitted patients are tested. Pregnant women scheduled for C-section or induction can enter through a separate drive-up entrance where they are tested. Based on the results, patients are sent to separate areas for care, but the hospital wants them to know that these protocols are ensuring their safety.

During birth, women are allowed one support person with them for labor. However, for safety reasons, this support must remain with the patient and will not be allowed to return to the patient room. Dr. Edwards recognizes the importance of women having a support person with them during labor and delivery. She says, "Studies show that that support can make a difference in the health of the mother".



“ I learned during my career that I was finding the most fulfillment by taking care of patients with complications by helping them navigate their pregnancy and have a healthy baby. It's hard work, but so rewarding. ”

Christine Edwards, MD
Maternal-Fetal-Medicine
West Boca Medical Center

Edwards recalls seeing a patient at 24 weeks of pregnancy who presented with fluid around the baby's heart. She didn't think the baby would make it, but with a partnership from pediatric cardiology, radiology, and OB, they were able to release the fluid around the heart and the baby's condition immediately improved. "This is an example of how the entire team at West Boca often comes together to provide the best possible care for patients of any age and condition," says Edwards.



[VIEW RECIPIENTS](#)

