

## Avoiding “Good Patient” Syndrome

Avoiding “Good Patient” Syndrome: The pitfalls of buying into the medical model of modern childbirth

There is a little known syndrome that can afflict many pregnant women, particularly first-timers. It is what I call “Good Patient” Syndrome.

It presents with the need for the pregnant mama to please her caregivers. Often she will undertake medical tests and procedures without understanding the need for or the value of the information provided by the tests. She will attend prenatal appointments promptly and regularly, but will leave her list of burning questions, unasked, in her pocket, for fear of taking up the time of her busy caregiver. She will accept any intervention or treatment offered to her, with the implicit understanding that her caregivers know best.

Does this sound familiar? It does to me.

Sometimes I feel a bout of “Good Patient” Syndrome coming on, myself. Luckily, over time, I have developed a chronic case of “Informed Consent” which generally presents with my caregivers having a sharp pain in the rear.

Seriously, though, in our work, the “Good Patient” crops up. I have had Doula Clients who will talk desperately about their need to ask the Doctor a specific, urgent question at their next prenatal appointment. When talking to Mama afterwards, oh how often have I heard “I was going to ask that, but there just wasn’t time.”

I once had strange “contractions” at 33 weeks of pregnancy that were regular enough to cause me concern. I went to the hospital because it was a long weekend and I wanted to be assessed. I was soon very sorry. The physician on call had the bedside manner of a troll. He interrogated me about what I was feeling and where, (perfectly good questions) but then implied that I didn’t know what I was talking about, didn’t know what contractions feel like (like HE did?) and somehow wanted to be in labor.

“No, they don’t feel like regular contractions. Maybe it ISN’T real labor. You tell me, Doc!”

Although I was concerned that I may be in pre-term labor, I found myself wishing, for just one minute, that my contractions were more NORMAL, just to make this troll and his cursed fetal monitor happier. How sad and just another example of “Good Patient” Syndrome. I didn’t want to waste anybody’s time.

In this case, a much nicer Doctor was able to tell me in the morning that I had a bladder infection, and I was quickly treated.

The lesson is this. We must encourage our mamas to listen to their bodies, and their instincts. This is for their benefit, as well as their baby’s.

Teach them that if something feels wrong, it is okay to ask questions. If your doctor is pressed for time, make time! Bring your list of questions. Lose the niceties about the weather and how hot it is. Rattle off your questions instead.

Preach and practice informed consent. I carry informed consent cards in my wallet and hand them out in my classes. (Sets of informed consent cards are for sale on [www.birthwares.com](http://www.birthwares.com))

You have the right to ask:

What your caregiver wants to do  
Why they want to do it  
What will happen if you don't do it  
What the risks are  
What else you could do

Birth is not about pleasing your doctor, following institutional rules, fitting into a medical culture, mastering a new medical language, or being a patient.

Birth is about listening to your body, connecting with your baby and birthing a family. Sometimes a "bad" patient is a woman becoming a great mother.

Happy birthing!

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