AIMS For a better birth...

What Is A Postnatal Doula Anyway?

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By Trudi Dawson

"So, erm, what do you actually do? I mean, like, what do they actually pay you for?"....

Essentially, my role is to "mother the mother". When a woman has a new baby, be it her first or her fourth, her body has gone through a huge experience. She may have had a completely hands-off unmedicated birth at home, or she may have had a complicated caesarean birth with a poorly baby. And everything in between. Whatever the circumstance, her body needs healing time. And lots of it.

And now this new family also has a precious baby to take care of, night AND day. They may have sore breasts, perhaps visitors, maybe other children to take care of, life admin to see to and a home to manage. And all whilst recovering from the birth. On top of all this, the parents will often have an emotional load to navigate. The overwhelming emotions associated with birth, new roles, this whole new dependent human as they transition from womb to world, and of course, the much lamented sleep deprivation.

So that's where a postnatal doula can help. I will come in and be there JUST for the mum (and the dad or partner, baby and other children, by default). I will help the mother get some sleep, provide nourishment, help keep on top of the house 'stuff' and generally be their right hand (wo)man. Doulas have experience and training and often wonderful additional skills and knowledge such as breastfeeding, nutrition, yoga,

alternative therapies, massage, placenta encapsulation, counselling, to name but a few. And if the family needs something that isn't in their skillset, they'll know where they can find it.

So what does all this love, care and support actually do? Is it just a nice-to-have luxury? Shouldn't we just all get on with it and be okay? We all know lots of families who didn't have a postnatal doula and survived. Well, here are some interesting stats for you: At 6 weeks postpartum a new mum is twice as likely to to feel depressed if she hasn't had a postpartum doula (23% versus 10%). Her satisfaction with her partner is significantly better if she has a doula (30% versus 71% reporting relationship is better right after birth), and 55% of mothers who had a doula (as opposed to 17% who didn't) feel that their babies cry less than others. So benefits of a doula can positively affect mum, partner*and* baby. [1]

"***I thought it was a bit of a luxury hiring a postnatal doula. But now I'm not sure how I would have managed. Recovering from a c-section and trying to learn to breastfeed, all whilst looking after a toddler, would have been impossible without her."***

If you think you might be interested in hiring a doula or finding out more, you can visitwww.doula.org.uk for a list of doulas in your area.

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1 Woman, WL., Chalmers, B., Homeyr, G.J. et al. Postpartum depression and companionship in the clinical birth environment. A randomised, controlled study. Taken from The Doula Book by Marshall H. Klaus, MD, John H Kennell, MD and Phyllis H. Klaus, CSW, MFT