

Argus Courier - PVH adds continuous epidural services

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PVH ADDS CONTINUOUS EPIDURAL SERVICES

PAIN-RELIEF PROCEDURE FOR WOMEN HAILED BY LOCAL HEALTH-CARE OFFICIALS

By DAN JOHNSON
ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

A substantial percentage of the population will never have an experiential understanding of the significance of a new 'round-the-clock service available at Petaluma Valley Hospital, and some people even confuse it with "epidemic," "durable" and other similar-sounding words.

But for wom-en in labor, the uninterrupted availability of epidural services — in which pain is relieved by in-serting a small amount of anesthesia through a catheter into the outer lining of the spinal cord — calls for a celebration.

"Unlike some other anesthetics, an epidural provides continuous pain relief during labor," said Dr. Gary Greensweig, chief medical officer at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, which, like PVH, is operated by St. Joseph Health System of Sonoma County. "It is very unusual for a hospital the (modest) size of Petaluma Valley Hospital — with the number of babies delivered there — to be able to continuously offer epidural services.

"It's a major step, and it's worth celebrating."

"Petaluma Valley Hospital has long needed the epidural services now being offered. We're very pleased to see that they're available," said Daymon Doss, CEO of the Petaluma Health Care District.

An epidural causes no side effects and does not affect the baby. It numbs a woman's lower body so that her pain is decreased or eliminated, and this enables her to save strength for pushing the baby out.

Epidural services have been offered at PVH, but not consistently. In April, they became available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Many women have utilized intrathecal injection for pain relief during childbirth, but it does not provide continuous pain relief.

“Intrathecal injections last about three or four hours, but they’re not as significant as epidurals during childbirth,” Greensweig said, adding that epidurals also can be utilized for pain relief in other situations, including additional obstetrical procedures.

The new PVH service is requiring more anesthesiologists.

“We’ve hired a couple more of them. Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital now has 20 or so, and we are sharing them with Petaluma Valley Hospital,” Greensweig said.

The addition of continuous epidural services is likely to boost the patient total at PVH, since women now no longer need to go to other hospitals for them.

“Petaluma Valley Hospital has delivered babies for many years without reliable epidural services, but some women have chosen to go to other hospitals,” Greensweig said. “Petaluma Valley Hospital has the capacity to handle more deliveries, but it has a lot of fixed costs. If we have more patients, the costs go down.

“I don’t know if an increase in patient load will totally make up the cost of offering epidurals. But they improve the quality of service for patients.”

By offering the services, PVH also has become more attractive to obstetrician/gynecologist physicians, some of whom suffered financially and/or left the area partially because they were not consistently available.

“It’s definitely a plus for physician recruitment and retention,” Greensweig said.

The need for continuous epidural services was singled out as one of the primary concerns of local residents during the due diligence process last year in which the PHCD ultimately decided to continue leasing PVH to St. Joseph Health System of Sonoma County through 2017.

“Epidural services have been discussed for quite some time,” Doss said. “We appreciate the efforts of OBGYN physicians, St. Joseph Health System and patients in waiting for them.”

“The nursing staff spent has put a lot of effort into preparing for them. We’re happy we’ve reached this point,” Greensweig added.

(Contact Dan Johnson at dan.johnson@arguscourier.com)

