

Whatcom Alliance for Healthcare Access
OB Capacity Forum 10/31/07
Meeting Summary

On the morning of October 31, 2007, 38 community stakeholders gathered for a forum on “Building Obstetrical Care in Whatcom County”. The participants were representative of obstetrical care providers and healthcare administrators.

The morning’s agenda was:

- Community physician recruitment & retention efforts (provided by Nancy Blume)
- “2007 Obstetric Care Gap Analysis” survey findings (provided by the SBDC Team of Tom Dorr & Aaron Ignac)
- Additional benchmark data (provided by Leasa Lowy, MD)
- Observations from the data (facilitated by Chris Phillips)
- Identifying opportunities for moving forward (facilitated by Sue Sharpe)

The [survey report](#) and Dr. Leasa Lowy’s [benchmark data](#) can be found on the WAHA website (www.WhatcomAlliance.org).

The following are the notes from the discussions regarding “observations” and the “opportunities” identified by the participants.

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Observations Identified and Discussed:

- OB’s provide the majority of deliveries.
- Overall, local delivery capacity is declining while projected # of births is increasing.
- More OB’s are needed, especially to handle high-risk deliveries and consultative services to other providers.
- The main issue appears to be about deliveries, not prenatal care. Whatcom County has a low infant mortality rate.
- The number of deliveries per/OB is high in our community relative to the current national standard set by ACOG.
- OB’s report feeling burdened due in part to the unpredictability of their caseloads.
- OB’s report feeling like “chief residents” when working in the Childbirth Center (i.e. responding to a multitude of unpredictable demands with limited resources).
- The current practice opportunities for the new OB’s are not attractive to new recruits.
- Some OB/GYN practices are unable to recruit qualified OB/GYN’s because GYN surgery cannot be guaranteed which is needed in order for the new recruit to take his/her boards. A contributing factor may be the number of OB/GYN’s who practice GYN exclusively in our community.
- FP’s concentrate on low-risk deliveries. VBAC’s are a limiting factor.
- FP’s also note that their ability to do obstetrics is limited by malpractice parameters. It was noted that this is sometimes perceived as “cherry picking”.

Opportunities Identified:

- Focus on improving the provider experience to support retention of existing physicians (i.e. work flow, coordination of resources, etc.)
- Look into the feasibility of a “Laborist” or “Hospitalist” program. In the course of the discussion, it became clear that there was not a mutually agreed upon definition of these two terms.
- Consider a hybrid system of a laborist or hospitalist program that addresses the need for financial viability as well as supports the OB’s.
- Consider the feasibility of the hospital contracting with existing OB/GYN’s to provide a level of hospitalist services.

- Consider the feasibility of a hospital medical group of new or existing OB/GYN providers.
- Help existing solo OB/GYN practices form as a group.

- Identify options for how the Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) role can be integrated into and enhance the local system.
- Consider if there are ways to make patient transfers between provider-types more predictable (e.g. Licensed Midwife to FP or FP to OB).
- Identify the opportunities for quality improvement within the Childbirth Center aimed at improving the patient and provider experience and increasing efficiency.
- Engage the hospital regarding opportunities for improving the physical plant of the Childbirth Center.
- Address the issue of malpractice costs (for OB’s) and limitations (for FP’s and CNM’s) through legislative work.

Next Steps:

- WAHA will distribute the meeting summary to all participants.
- Current WAHA Recruitment & Retention Advisory Committee will meet and make recommendations regarding the convening of a workgroup for the purpose of focusing on the opportunities noted above. Recommendation will include suggested composition of an OB Workgroup, scope of work and convening process.
- WAHA will convene a representative group of the OB Forum (held on 10/31/07) to present the above noted recommendations.