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UAMS, Mena Regional Health Collaborate to Strengthen Doula Support in Polk County

FAYETTEVILLE — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and the Mena Regional Health System are working together to strengthen maternal care in Polk County by improving collaboration between clinical staff and doulas.

The UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation has developed the Advancing Doulas and Perinatal Teams (ADAPT) Toolkit, which provides proven models and tools to integrate doulas into care teams, improving both patient and provider experiences. The institute piloted the toolkit earlier this year with Mercy Hospital in Northwest Arkansas.

"Incorporating doulas to the scope of maternal care here at Mena Regional Health System provides an additional level of choice care, enriching the experience of pregnancy as well as birthing and postpartum care," said Paul Ervin, CEO of the Mena Regional Health System.

Doulas are trained birth coaches who provide continuous emotional support, advocate for and aid informed decision-making during labor and delivery, assist with breastfeeding initiation and support, promote positive maternal mental health, and advocate for culturally sensitive care in clinical and nonclinical settings.

"Mena Regional Health System is excited to partner with UAMS to strengthen maternal care in our community through doula support," said Amber Williams, RN, director of Women's Services at the hospital. "We believe every mom deserves to feel supported, informed, and cared for throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and beyond. Through this partnership, we look forward to working together to create a more positive birth experience and better outcomes for mothers and babies in our community."

The use of doulas has been strongly advocated by the institute and other partners to improve maternal and infant mortality rates across the state. Last year, the state approved measures paving the way for doula services in Arkansas to be reimbursable by Medicaid.

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“Doulas engage families early in pregnancy and support them through postpartum, bringing cultural insight, emotional support, and trusted relationships into clinical settings that can feel overwhelming,” said Hannah McHardy, senior director of programs at the institute. “Their integration with medical teams creates a continuity of care that drives better outcomes.”

Since launching the ADAPT toolkit at Mercy, 45 clinical staff at the hospital have been trained in doula integration practices, with a reported 47% increase in understanding of a doula’s scope of practice among staff. One staff member stated, “I was most surprised to learn how much time doulas spend with patients before they arrive at the hospital and after going home. Now I get why outcomes improve with doulas.”

Doulas also reported increased collaboration and stronger relationships with staff since the hospital adopted the toolkit.

“Having this program makes such a difference,” one doula said. “I love to come here. I receive ‘Thank You’s from beginning to end.”

The ADAPT toolkit is part of the institute’s initiative to increase access to doulas across the state of Arkansas. Working with Ujima Maternity Network, Birthing Beyond, and other partners, the institute has provided doula training to more than 100 individuals in Arkansas.

To learn more about the institute’s Doula Expansion Initiative or to view the ADAPT toolkit, visit uams.health/doula.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospitals in Little Rock and Bryant; an orthopaedic hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise, including affiliated hospitals in Pine Bluff, Helena-West Helena, Mena, and Warren. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,813 students and 1,030 medical residents and fellows, and two dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with about 12,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube or Instagram.

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