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URGENT

SUBJECT: Lack of epidurals continues at GMHA

Dear Honorable Governor and Senators;
GMHA Board of Trustees;
Dr. Larry Lizama (Medical Director);
Mr. Rey Vega (Acting Hospital Administrator);

I write to plea for your leadership to assist mothers in labor crying out for help to relieve their pain while giving birth. I have brought this to your attention on several occasions and it remains a grave concern.

Honorable Governor, last year you advocated for mothers suffering and you shared your concern with criticism of the lack of epidurals at GMHA in your address. After which, a new medical director, and a new Board of Trustees was put in place. It's been over a year now and unfortunately mothers are continuing to scream in severe pain without epidurals at GMHA.

Honorable Senators at a recent oversight public hearing at GMHA, you were told by the administration that epidural service was going to be instituted by March 2012. Today we are already into April and there remains no epidural to relieve pain for mothers in labor. Obviously, the hospital is failing our mothers and their families, and this is so disappointing especially seeing millions of dollars being pumped into GMHA and we cannot even provide adequate pain relief for suffering mothers.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American Society of Anesthesiologist (ASA) states the following on epidurals for mothers, "There are no circumstances where it is considered acceptable for an individual to experience untreated severe pain, amendable to safe intervention, while under a physician's care. In the absence of a medical contraindication, maternal request is a sufficient medical indication for pain relief during labor."

The New England Journal of Medicine recently stated and cites, “Although severe pain is not life-threatening in healthy parturient women, it can have neuropsychological consequences. Postnatal depression may be more common when analgesia is not used, and pain during labor has been correlated with the development of post-traumatic stress disorder. Men are also affected by severe labor pain. A survey of first-time fathers showed that the men whose partners received an epidural felt three times as helpful and involved during labor and delivery and had less anxiety and stress, as compared with men whose partners did not receive an epidural.”

Moreover, without going into great detail, you should know that certain medical conditions actually recommend the use of an epidural to give mothers a greater chance at having a vaginal birth without the availability of an epidural, mothers usually resort to a cesarean section.

It is obvious. Providing epidurals is part of providing good obstetric care for pregnant moms. Not every mother needs it, but it has to be made available and is considered a must option for adequate relief of severe pain in laboring mothers.

It is unconscionable and shameful to not provide such service in medicine today. I ask that we work together to find a solution for epidural service to for our mothers here on island.

Let’s work hard to ease the suffering of mothers giving birth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Shieh', written in a cursive style.

Thomas Shieh, MD, FACOG

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Fellow, American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology*