

Midwife Management of Epidural Analgesia In 2nd Stage Labour – A Survey

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Background: Research evidence suggests that reducing or ceasing analgesia, provided by a working epidural, during the 2nd stage of labour may not only increase maternal pain[1] and distress but also increase the risk of caesarean section and instrumental delivery.[2] Anecdotal reports at our institution suggested women with effective epidural labour analgesia were frequently experiencing severe pain and distress during 2nd stage labour. We aimed to investigate midwifery beliefs and practice regarding epidural analgesia during 2nd stage labour.

Methods: We performed a cross-sectional survey of midwives' knowledge and management of epidural analgesia during 2nd stage labour at the two large tertiary referral centres for maternity care in South Australia - one where a PCEA had been recently introduced and the other using a midwife epidural 'top-up' regimen. A 10-item questionnaire was distributed to midwives at the two sites. Midwives were asked about their beliefs regarding the effects of epidural analgesia on 2nd stage labour and how they managed epidural analgesia during 2nd stage labour.

Results: Of the 115 midwives available at the time of the survey, 104 (90%) responded. Only 34 midwives (29%) believed that epidural analgesia in 2nd stage labour had no effect on labour and delivery outcome. Most midwives reported that they either reduced or ceased epidural analgesia in the 2nd stage of labour, and indicated that this would reduce the intervention rate and facilitate an uncomplicated delivery.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest that midwives' management of reducing labour epidural analgesia during 2nd stage is inconsistent with the available evidence which shows this practice increases maternal pain[1] and may also increase the intervention rate.[2]

References

1. Torvaldsen S, Roberts CL, Bell JC, et al. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2004, Issue 4. Art. No. CD004457
2. Abenhaim HA and Fraser WD. Am J Obstet Gynecol 2008; 199:500.e1-500.e6