

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/clinician-care-priorities-and-practices-in-the-fourth-trimester/>

In the fall of 2023 and early 2024, a study was conducted through an anonymous online survey targeting obstetricians, midwives, and family medicine physicians in California. The survey aimed to explore two main topics: how clinicians prioritize various clinical responsibilities within their time and resource constraints and the degree to which they adhere to guidelines from the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) regarding postpartum care.

The study was motivated by rising concerns over maternal mortality and morbidity rates, as well as significant disparities in maternal health. ACOG provided recommendations in 2018 to improve care in the first 12 weeks postpartum, outlining 26 components of care that clinicians should follow. The survey results indicated that while clinicians rarely perform all recommended components of postpartum care, they prioritize certain aspects such as mental health (depression and anxiety), breast health, vaginal birth complications, and family planning, which they tend to check consistently.

Conversely, components related to social health drivers, such as diet monitoring and screening for intimate partner violence, were less prioritized, suggesting room for improvement in adherence to ACOG guidelines. The study highlighted challenges faced by clinicians, including time constraints and patient readiness to discuss complex issues during early postpartum visits. Additionally, it was noted that years of practice experience impacted clinicians' ability and willingness to address social and behavioral health issues.

The findings emphasized the need for better collaboration among healthcare professionals to address comprehensive postpartum care and highlighted strategies such as enhancing awareness of social determinants of health, integrating community resources, and improving guideline accessibility in clinical settings.

Notably, obstetricians and midwives displayed different priorities in care components based on their practice settings and patient needs. Midwives tended to spend more time with patients, focusing more on social and emotional support, whereas obstetricians emphasized clinical complications. The study concluded that a collaborative model of care involving both midwives and obstetricians could better meet the diverse needs of postpartum patients.

Lastly, the study participants advocated for extending Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum to ensure continuity of care, which could enhance support for chronic conditions and improve overall maternal health outcomes. The California Department of Healthcare Services is also working on initiatives to transform maternal health services, aiming for better coordination of care.