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Dignity Health Dramatically Reduces Early Elective Deliveries, Prevents NICU Stays
Organization prevents NICU stays for 70 newborns, saves \$1 million in less than a year

San Francisco, CA – January 22, 2013 – Dignity Health, the fifth largest health system in the nation, announced today that it has reduced early elective deliveries from 7 percent to 1 percent in less than one year after a focused education and intervention effort.

The 32 hospitals in the Dignity Health system that operate labor and delivery units have reduced early elective deliveries between 37 and 39 weeks of gestation and have saved an estimated \$1 million in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit costs. Most Dignity Health hospitals are already at zero percent, showing that the goal of improved quality outcomes and lower costs can be achieved in tandem. Dignity Health member hospital Mercy Medical Center in particular has reduced their early elective deliveries significantly – from 27 percent to zero percent.

For the past two decades, the frequency of early elective deliveries has been on the rise. Expectant mothers often prefer to plan the birth date in advance and be assured of having their own doctor deliver the baby. Other factors include reducing the number of days of discomfort during late stage pregnancy, and making sure that an anticipated quick delivery occurs in a hospital.

However, early elective delivery comes with risks, including increased newborn feeding problems, increased respiratory distress syndrome, and increased Neonatal Intensive Care admissions, according to the California Maternal Quality Care Collaborative. Newborns admitted to the NICU typically spend five days in the hospital.

“Bringing a new life into the world is one of life’s most rewarding experiences, both for a family and for caregivers,” said Robert Wiebe, MD, chief medical officer for Dignity Health. “We always want to give our children the best possible start in life, and that is what this effort is all about.”

Wiebe said the significant results in the first few months of the program prompted Dignity Health to accelerate what had been a three-year implementation timetable.

“We applaud Dignity Health for their commitment to the health of moms and babies,” shares Leslie Kowalewski, Associate State Director of the March of Dimes in California. “Their efforts are showing a positive impact in the health and wellbeing of their patients. We hope all hospital systems will take a similar stand and join the efforts of Dignity Health to make these constructive changes.”

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Dignity Health is following a plan based on recommendations by the March of Dimes, which includes education and training for caregivers and patients, algorithms for scheduling deliveries, a checklist that includes medically necessary early deliveries and a policy for a hard stop for patients that do not meet certain criteria, such as hypertension or preeclampsia.

Dignity Health is one of only 26 organizations federally designated as a Hospital Engagement Network and has committed to reducing preventable hospital acquired conditions by 40 percent and preventable complications requiring readmissions by 20 percent.

“The most important thing is that by putting this plan in place, we are enabling families to take their newborns home healthier and more quickly following delivery,” says Dr. Laurence Shields, Co-Chair of the Perinatal Safety Improvement Committee at Dignity Health.

All hospitals in the system are focusing on evidence-based practices, multidisciplinary education to improve communication, investments in information technology, and partnerships with other community members. In addition, Dignity Health has introduced a new application for doctors called AirStrip OB™, a remote fetal monitoring application used in high risk pregnancies, and is testing an app for parents of NICU patients.

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About Dignity Health

Dignity Health, one of the nation’s five largest health care systems, is a 17-state network of nearly 11,000 physicians, 56,000 employees, and more than 300 care centers, including hospitals, urgent and occupational care, imaging centers, home health, and primary care clinics. Headquartered in San Francisco, Dignity Health is dedicated to providing compassionate, high-quality and affordable patient-centered care with special attention to the poor and underserved. In 2011, Dignity Health provided \$1.6 billion in charitable care and services. For more information, please visit our website at www.dignityhealth.org. You can also follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).