



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

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MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

SUBJECT: Epidural Analgesia for Normal Vaginal Deliveries

This summer we convened a series of meetings on women's health issues attended by Service obstetricians-gynecologists, anesthesiologists, primary care physicians, and registered nurses. We requested this Tri-Service group to determine whether the Medical Health Services System should include the option of epidural analgesia for normal vaginal deliveries. Numerous professional medical and nursing organizations have identified the advantages to the patient of epidural analgesia which is an available option for normal deliveries in many communities. The 1992 Guidelines for Perinatal Care, coauthored by the American Academy of pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, state that "Control of discomfort and pain during labor and delivery is a necessary part of good obstetric practice." They continue, "Of the various pharmacologic methods used for pain relief during labor and delivery, lumbar epidural block is the most effective and least depressant, allowing for an alert, participating mother."

The consensus of the Service representatives was that epidural analgesia should be an option for normal deliveries. I am hereby establishing Department of Defense policy that the option of epidural analgesia for normal deliveries, consistent with the clinical determination of appropriateness by the health care provider, shall be available to all women who seek obstetrical care from our health care system. This policy is effective 1 January 1993. Due to the need to avoid unnecessary disruption in the distribution of staff and resources, civilian hiring and/or contracting, full implementation (especially for small facilities) may take until 30 September 1993.

Please provide me with copies of your instructions and phased implementation plan for this policy no later than 1 December 1992. The point of contact in my office on this matter is Lieutenant Colonel Gale Pollock, AN. For additional information, your staff may contact her at (703) 695-7116.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Enrique Mendez, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Enrique Mendez, Jr., M.D.

Last update: 7/8/1998