

Just another day



at the office

Deliveries are vital to hospital, community



At ease
R.N. Sheryl Symonds jokes with a mother-to-be in the labor room at Benewah Community Hospital. (Below) The expecting mother and her visiting dad walk the halls prior to the onset of labor pains.

Photos and Report by Ralph Bartholdt

It is 9 a.m. on a Saturday in late summer. A gentle radiance falls into the labor room from a large east-facing window.

Sheryl Symonds can't think of a better way to spend a morning. Wearing a smock and a smile, the Benewah Community Hospital RN is preparing a patient for a delivery.

"We'll have you out of here by noon," the nurse tells a woman in a blue-checked gown. "Last time it seemed like ten minutes and ... Oh, my gosh!"

Mrs. Symonds refers to a night almost two years ago when the woman gave birth minutes after being admitted to the hospital.

In her four years at Benewah Community, the OB nurse has assisted in about 60 births. The excitement, underlying now, is apparent despite the technical preparations of monitors, IVs and paperwork.

In a small community such as St. Maries, repeat patients in the delivery room are not uncommon.

"If you live here, you have children here," Mrs. Symonds, whose daughter, Autumn, was delivered in St. Maries, says. "A good share of our patients have babies repeatedly."

The idea of keeping expecting mothers in St. Maries is at the heart of the hospital's community-based philosophy. Children born at the hospital, and their parents, become part of a larger family that involves checkups with a family physician and familiar faces in an environment that otherwise can seem aseptic and alien.

It is significant to the hospital as well.

"Doing OB is really important for us here," Shannon Badgett, the hospital's chief nurse said. "It is not only a service we can deliver in our community where friends and family can be close by, but babies that are delivered here tend to stay in the system, with the same doctor for their children."

Today's birth will be the last delivery at BCH for Dr. Leslie Stone. She and her physician husband, Mike, and their family are moving to Oregon. Losing a female physician is a blow to the hospital and the community, because, even before the Stone's moved to St. Maries seven years ago, hospital surveys showed that patients wanted a female doctor especially for deliveries and prenatal care.

As an equal opportunity employer the hospital can't actively seek out a female physician to replace Dr. Stone but, "ideally, a female physician to deliver babies would

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Benewah Community Hospital RN



Hello, baby Dr. Leslie Stone delivered her last baby at the St. Maries hospital in August, before moving to Oregon with her family. She views a new arrival in the labor room (above) along with the new baby's family (below).

be great," Mrs. Badgett said.

Sheila McGowan-Conoly, a certified nurse midwife, joined the hospital staff last year, and although her practice is growing, midwifery is just catching on as an alternative to having a physician for prenatal care and deliveries, she said.

Since 1990, an average of 70 babies annually have been delivered at the county's hospital, with Dr. Stone delivering 50 of the 76 babies born at Benewah Community Hospital in 1999. Four other staff physicians deliver babies with some regularity, but in the last four years Dr. Stone has delivered more than half of the babies born at the hospital.

The facility employs 13 registered nurses who are qualified to assist with deliveries that cost about \$3,200 for a vaginal birth and more for cesarean delivery. Of the total, the hospital charge is around \$1,500 and the remainder is billed by the physician.



Services include prenatal and childbirth education classes. Follow-up checks in a new mother's home are also available.

Today's birth goes as smoothly as Mrs. Symonds predicted. The result: a seven-pound girl is born before noon.

The RN beams after the delivery

"I don't think there's anything neater than watching someone become a mom and watching the baby come out," Mrs. Symonds says. "Every time it's like a miracle. Every single delivery is like a miracle."

