

Overview

Kearny County Hospital in Lakin, Kansas offers obstetrics services throughout 12 counties in southwest Kansas and eastern Colorado. Expecting mothers often have to travel up to two hours for care. Though Lakin is a town of just 2,400 residents, the critical access hospital's Family Health Center has grown dramatically in the past two decades, from serving 2,000 patients to 22,000. Kearny's obstetrics program has driven much of the growth and is viewed as a critical component of the hospital's service lines.

In 2015, Kearny launched the Pioneer Baby program in partnership with KU School of Medicine-Wichita to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes by reducing pregnancy complications, premature births, low- or extremely high-birth weight, and cesarean sections while increasing breastfeeding rates among rural, at-risk, reproductive-age women. Funding from the Children's Miracle Network allowed Kearny to institute upgraded computer software for the OB unit, improved transportation options, and monthly visits from a maternal-fetal medicine specialist for high-risk pregnant women. Donations from local, large employers were used to purchase a 4D ultrasound machine. The Pioneer Baby program offers participants Becoming a Mom prenatal



education curriculum, a virtual breastfeeding network, a breastfeeding walk-in clinic and a diabetes prevention program. The hospital also helps mothers purchase car seats using a portion of its funds from the 340B Drug Pricing program.

Impact

The increased resources resulting from the Pioneer Baby program and overall focus on its OB service allowed Kearny to double its number of delivering providers from four to eight, as well as ramp up nurse staff training. Kearny also expanded its service offerings. Staff and nurses receive lactation training to better support new moms interested in breastfeeding. Kearny's outreach clinic is staffed by a perinatologist one day a month who sees high risk obstetrics patients and offers recommendations on perinatal care. In recent years, Kearny has also focused on quantitative blood loss initiatives, OB hemorrhage risk assessment, timely treatment for hypertension and preeclampsia, and begun participating in a neonatal abstinence syndrome program.

Controlling gestational diabetes has been a notable area of success. The rate of babies with fetal macrosomia born to mothers with gestational diabetes decreased from 28% in 2015 to 17% in 2018. Its team actively monitors and reviews elective labor inductions for pregnant moms less than 39 weeks, which Kearny believes reduces primary C-section rates. In 2020, Kearny's primary C-section rate was 13.6%, well below the national average. At the same time, Kearny has partnered with groups such as Kansas University's School of Medicine, a learning exchange that has helped the hospital to improve its own methods of care delivery.

Lessons Learned

Kearny clinicians say they have been surprised to learn just how different the needs are between urban and



rural expecting moms. Whereas an urban patient may be satisfied with a more technical, app-based approach to her care and treatment plan, rural mothers-to-be place much higher value on personal connection and conversation, and want intimate interaction with their provider around their needs. In response, Kearny has changed its approach to maternal care to place more emphasis now on getting to know its moms on a more personal level.

Lacey Mollel, clinic operations manager noted, “The compassion component is what our patients seem to care the most about. So we strive to take the time at the

bedside with a one-on-one OB nurse to sit and have long conversations with moms throughout their pregnancy, answering their questions.” This approach to maternal care is reflected in Kearny’s nurse training programs.

Because OB/GYNS are not staffed in-house, the team continues to learn what it means to practice obstetrics in an isolated area. Timely transfers can become challenging if limited by other hospitals’ bed availability, or severe weather conditions. Therefore, Kearny continues to teach, train and develop skills for obstetrical emergencies, even if these emergencies arise infrequently.

Future Goals

Kearny care providers understand that continued success with its OB program requires flexibility and the willingness to adapt protocols to new information. Meeting the needs of the community is essential in providing quality care. Kearny is paying more attention to various social determinants of health and the related struggles that some of its patients face throughout their pregnancy. The hospital is trying to address any care gaps and provide services for high-risk mothers who are not necessarily at high-risk medically, but are high risk in terms of social determinants.

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VIDEO

Rural Health Equity Matters

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