

# Subbing for Grandma

Doulas help new mothers learn their job

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**T**he soft little blanket goes over and under one side, over and under the other, then tucks underneath. Voila! It's a "baby burrito," Elaine Petrowski's original way to describe a swaddled newborn.

Petrowski, a certified postpartum doula — a trained "mother's mentor" for hire — is brimming with helpful techniques and suggestions for new parents and their babies.

Swaddling is one of those skills mothers

have passed on to daughters from time immemorial. Today, however, grandmothers may have career commitments or be too geographically distant to help with a new baby.

Enter the doula, who is trained to offer non-judgmental support, newborn care, and breast-feeding advice. She'll even cook dinner, do the laundry, or read to older siblings.

A doula may hang out her shingle once she's completed a three-day training session, required reading, and an apprenticeship under an experienced postpartum doula. Although doulas are not licensed or regulated in New Jersey, a formal certification program has recently been established by Birthworks,

based in Medford. However, much of a doula's know-how is gleaned from life experience and honed through personal interaction.

Stuffed into Petrowski's "Mary Poppins" bag are items she's come to consider essential to her trade: baby-care videos, an infant carrier sling, a pocket guide to lactation, product samples, and resource lists for the new mother.

"It's like helping a baby bird fly," said Petrowski, a 54-year-old mother of two grown daughters.

The doula (pronounced DOO-lah) con-  
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## Love, support, and encouragement for the entire family

Elaine Petrowski received her training two years ago through Vicky Hedley and Susan Esserman of Seventh Moon Perinatal Support Services. Hedley, of Montvale, is also a labor doula. These women give verbal encouragement and emotional support to the laboring mother before and after going to the hospital.

"There's always room for a doula at a birth," Hedley said. "She can be the one to facilitate discussion with family members in the hospital waiting room; she can manage everything in a house during a home birth.

"Her role is not usurping the place of medical professionals, but to work with the mom and

her partner. She keeps the birth energy positive."

This doesn't leave Dad out in the cold either, said Hedley, a part-time accountant who has five children ranging in age from 20 to 1.

"Many husbands are thrilled with the idea because it gives them the freedom to be at the birth at the level they're comfortable with," Hedley said.

"We want them to just love their wives and not feel they have to know everything. A doula doesn't take away his role but helps him in supporting his partner."

Her own husband, Tom Harrington, has gotten used to handing her the phone at 2 a.m., and her friends pitch in to help

care for her children when necessary.

"I made an effort to bring the people around me into my work so they feel part of it," Hedley said. "If they're taking my kids to school or feeding them they are also helping bring a baby into the world."

— Abigail Leichman

### To find a local doula:

Birthnet: (201) 505-1262

Birthworks: (888) TO-BIRTH or  
www.birthworks.com

Doulas of North America (DONA):  
(888) 788-DONA or www.dona.org