



From Racism to Remote Monitoring

Written by Katherine Sylvester

At 40 weeks, my blood pressure decided it wanted to creep up
That combined with swelling and increased protein in a cup

Were indicators that my body was under an abnormal amount of stress
So my midwife checked to make sure my baby wasn't in distress

After confirming that she wasn't, we made the decision to induce
Because there was no way I was going to the hospital with COVID on the loose

We decided to start the process at 12:30 the next day
Before the diagnosis of preeclampsia could have the final say

Because I know that once labeled, put in a box and categorized
Protocols can result in a woman's desires and design being trivialized

It could have quickly gone from "allowing me" to try for a natural delivery
To an onslaught of medical interventions presented with chivalry

From bed rest, magnesium drips, epidurals and Pitocin
To baby distress, time constraints and an imbalance of oxytocin

To a c-section delivery because "they had to get the baby out"
And please hear me, I am not saying that this is never the right route

But what I am saying is that many cesarean deliveries could be avoided
If a mom's design, designer and inherent power weren't nullified and voided

If she knew that unnecessary medical intervention could actually slow progression
And that although pitocin strengthens contractions, it can also result in regression

That it can cause her uterus to squeeze too forcibly and make it hard for her baby to breathe
And that instead of her getting rest between contractions, she could feel like there is no reprieve

You know, it's the lack of true informed consent that presents the biggest issue
And all that trauma goes on to invade and take up residence in a mother's tissue

It manifests itself later as fear of getting pregnant again and self-doubt



When all she needed in the first place was time to let her baby come out

So with nipple stimulation, position changes and the strategic breaking of my water
Modifying my movements and breathing based on what was noted on the monitor

The belief of my family, midwife and doula that my body could, indeed, do it
And the strength of my Heavenly Father along with a warm bath to get me through it

My daughter was born in 4 hours and 47 minutes in the water
And was promptly placed on my chest within seconds of when our midwife caught her

While my husband cut the umbilical cord and my vaginal tears were repaired
My newborn breastfed with her big brother and self-appointed protector there

After a few hours of ensuring that my body settled down and our baby was okay
My midwife left me with orders to rest and take my blood pressure twice a day

But resting is relative right so as is customary when a new child makes an appearance
We invited family over, did a newborn photo shoot and considered this adherence

So within days of delivery, my blood pressure climbed to unprecedented heights
And in writing this poem, I realized that it was my body exercising its rights

To tell me that I was overdoing it; that my blood vessels and kidneys needed time to heal
That the threat of kidney failure and having a stroke after delivery were all too real

That I had resources and support and I needed to use them to the fullest capacity
Or the things the OB said that I was assigned to following delivery could have some veracity

To my face, he said your kidneys won't recover-I've had patients like you before
You'll be on blood pressure meds for the rest of your life; can you imagine what he said behind
closed doors?

I'll tell you

He said he knew I didn't have a regular doctor and wouldn't follow up with him if I did
And that on the off chance that I survived, my body wasn't fit for having another kid

That considering the fact that I was older, Black and lived most of my life in the south,



He was certain I had high blood pressure pre-pregnancy and couldn't control the foods I put in my mouth

He didn't care that my records showed my blood pressure average to be one hundred over 60
Or that I worked out almost daily and my resting heart rate barely made it to 50

Or that when the preeclampsia was discovered, my blood pressure was about 128 over 80
So I'm pretty sure that had he been my birthing provider, his assumptions could have killed me and my baby

And this is one of the mistakes that underlie maternal death, infant mortality and avoidable complications

Along with protocol-driven inductions, c-sections and a lack of individualization

There is the lack of intercollaboration, communication, surveillance, and care coordination
Referrals to other healthcare providers and inter-office visit recommendations

Think about it

For every woman who has a kidney injury, there is renal doctor who can help
For every bony malalignment, there's a chiropractor with experience under his belt
For every instance of uncontrolled high blood pressure and heart failure, there's a cardiologist
For every woman who needs higher surveillance during pregnancy, there is a perinatologist
For every vaginal tear, displaced uterus and weak pelvic floor, there's a physical therapist
For every woman struggling with anxiety and postpartum depression, there is a mental health specialist

There are doulas who are present for labor, delivery and afterwards to provide intercession
The point here is that for every need, there is a healthcare provider who can provide intervention

But the reality is, with the pace of the current healthcare system, things can be missed
And issues witnessed, experienced or communicated are inadvertently or intentionally dismissed

So Operation MIST exists and persists to fill in the gaps and shore up the team
So eliminating the maternal health crisis can become more than just a dream

Now, instead of women being seen 2% of the period they're at risk for complications
Their vitals are monitored 100% of the time by healthcare providers from a remote location



Providers who learn the details of a mom's day-to-day life, desires, and fears
The nuances of her diet, exercise, stressors and what brings her to tears

Then combine what they learn with information from a smart device to establish a unique
baseline
And since women are never compared to anyone else, their physiology is never undermined

When she deviates significantly from her norms, through text or phone call communication
A brainstorming session ensues with her MIST monitor to determine the cause of the deviation

Most of the time, the underlying issue can be corrected with lifestyle modification
But on occasion, the changes warrant deeper and more extensive investigation

To that end, our moms have embraced self-advocacy and discovered the power of asking
questions
And thus, have avoided unnecessary inductions, preterm deliveries, and cesarean sections

Between office visits, infections, anemia, heart issues, and preeclampsia have been identified
And self-prioritization plus early intervention resulted in every issue being rectified

Operation MIST gives moms and birthing providers what they need to make data-driven
decisions
It removes bias and racism from the equation demanding a higher level of precision and
provisions

It gives women the numbers they need to get a second opinion if their symptoms are dismissed
For we know that when armed with objective data, less women will be affected by this

It exists so women can have better outcomes and make more informed and confident choices
So that when asked about their birth stories, those listening hear joy and peace in their voices

It exists so women don't settle for just being grateful that they and their baby survived
But instead, are able to revel in the fact that they did everything they could to thrive

It exists so women are emboldened to make choices now that won't negatively impact them
later
And so they activate the power within that was strategically placed by their creator

It exists so women can get back to being in tune with and trusting their intuition
And so the maternal health crisis no longer instills fear, but results in clearer vision

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This poem was written so you would know the why behind our unrelenting determination
To educate as we live up to and follow through on the following dedication

***On our honor
We will strive
To save moms
And their babies
To monitor faithfully,
Intervene meaningfully
And create an environment where both can thrive***