



*In this issue:*

*“Noteworthy: A Conversation with a CABC-Accredited Birth Center”*

CABC Commissioner Sandra Lawrence interviews Greta Gill, CNM of El Rio Birth & Women’s Health Center

Greta Cohn Gill, CNM is Director of Midwifery at El Rio Birth & Women’s Health Center. She and Sandie recently spent time talking about the history, present, and future of the birth center.



**Sandie: How did the birth center get started?**

**Greta:** Beginning as a place where women could have choice and freedom during pregnancy and birth, the birth center has continued to evolve and grow and today offers comprehensive care for the whole family.

The same passions that prompted the establishment of the birth center in 1982, excellence and options in healthcare accessible to all, have continued to guide the organization throughout the birth center’s history.

**Sandie: What is important for you to have in a birth center?**

**Greta:** Continuity is important for women to get the best possible care. For pregnant woman, this means she gets to know her midwives, and they know her. This assures that they will be by her side, whether giving birth at the birth center or at the collaborative hospital. Relationships established there over the past 3 decades mean that she knows that as much of her birth plan as possible is honored, should a transfer be needed. These partnerships also mean delayed cord clamping and skin-to-skin contact with her newborn for the first hour after birth is standard in both settings.

*This is the first interview in a new series, “Noteworthy: A Conversation with a CABC-Accredited Birth Center”*

El Rio Birth & Women’s Health Center is located in Tucson, AZ. It was the state’s first freestanding birth center and has been a committed member of the Tucson area medical community for 36 years. Opened in 1982, this birth center has been CABC-accredited since 1991.

**Sandie: How has the birth center changed since its inception?**

**Greta:** In 2007, the birth center joined El Rio Community Health Center, and was designated as a Federally Qualified Health Center. This provided the option for women who were Medicaid eligible to receive care at the birth center. Another notable change was that in addition to caring for the women of Tucson, in 2016 El Rio Birth and Women’s Health Center established a Family Medicine program that allows families throughout the Tucson area to receive personalized and progressive care at all stages of life.

**Sandie: What other services does the birth center offer?**

**Greta:** Education and support for our clients have been priorities for El Rio Birth and Women’s Health Center, and we have offered Centering Pregnancy as an option for women and their partners for over a decade. We also recently added Centering Parenting to help families navigate the challenges that





come with parenting. Birth and postpartum preparation classes are standard during prenatal care. The Baby Love Group offers a friendly place for moms and dads of new babies to support one another.

Family support does not stop at the Tucson city limits, or even at the Arizona state line. The health center proudly supports women across the country as a collection site for donor breastmilk, sent to the nearest Milk Bank in Colorado.

**Sandie:** It sounds like education is important to your birth center.

**Greta:** The emphasis on education extends well beyond the walls of the birth center. There is an ongoing need to educate 3<sup>rd</sup> party payers about the value and savings the midwifery model of care brings to the healthcare market.

Public education is also critical. The percentage of woman choosing midwifery care in the area remains low, with just 1-2% of the births in the county occurring in the birth center. The belief that “elective hospitalization” is the safest and best option for birth remains the prevalent school of thought. Changing the narrative around what birth can be for

women is a challenge. Dispelling the myth that a healthy woman with a healthy pregnancy is safer in a hospital setting takes constant communication and reeducation of the community at large, not just the women in their care. Bringing the midwifery model of care into the family practice arena is a huge step forward.

**Sandie:** Why do you feel CABC accreditation is important?

**Greta:** Accreditation is a statement of commitment to saying what one is going to do and then doing it. The accreditation standards are a promise that a birth center will do more than the minimum to assure women, and the babies born to them, are as safe as possible.

Additionally, retaining accreditation allows for a continued improvement process, carving out a space for self-evaluation and self improvement.

**Sandie:** Any final thoughts?

**Greta:** El Rio Birth Center and Women’s (family) Health Center broke ground, and barriers in healthcare, 36 years ago and we continue to be at the forefront of improving care for women, and now for the entire family.



*Have an idea for a future newsletter topic? Let us know!*

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