

WHY YOU SHOULD HIRE A DOULA FOR THE BEST CHILDBIRTH EXPERIENCE *an interview with Dr. Cheney Brinkley D.C.*

I recently had the chance to chat with the amazing Dr. Cheney Brinkley who is a Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.), as well as a certified hypnobirthing practitioner and Doula. She currently practices in her hometown of Atlanta and specializes in Chiropractic care for both adults and children.

Tiffany: In our last interview we talked about how Chiropractic can really be a game changer for a child. I know Chiropractic care is so important to you, but childbirth and Doula care is also very close to your heart. Can you tell me how you became a Doula? Was there any special training or education you had to do to perform this role?

Dr. Brinkley: When I first decided to become a Doula, in my head I just wanted to be a person that had the knowledge to answer questions relating to childbirth. I had all these pregnant patients coming in [for adjustments] and didn't really have the familiarity that I felt I needed for that topic. A few of the colleagues I worked with suggested I consider becoming a Doula. Even if I never actually participated in live births over the long term, I could at least gain knowledge through training, which would benefit my practice and patients. What I didn't anticipate was how amazing practicing as a Doula was going to be. I now try to participate in a certain number of births throughout the year because I love it so much. When I first decided to dive into this area, I was a Chiropractic student seeing a really large number of pregnant patients in the clinic. I knew a pregnant, first time Mom that wasn't from the area. She and her partner moved down here and they didn't have any family in the area. She asked another student and I would be at the birth to help her get through the process. That kind of shifted me into high gear. I searched online to find where to take classes. The education process included attending a big workshop, researching information, writing papers, and attending 25 hours of live births as well as being present at three births (one being a C-section). After finishing all requirements, I was able to be certified. Luck was in my favor because I was fortunate to have enough pregnant Mom's in the beginning of my journey to fill the requirements quickly.

Tiffany: I noticed in our society today you hear the word "Doula" a lot more than a decade or so ago. This got me kind of interested in the meaning of the word, so I looked it up and Doula actually originates from the Greek language, meaning "women's servant." It seems like this practice of having a woman bedside goes way back in history, and it's kind of fallen by the wayside. Why do you think we are heading back in the direction of having a Doula today as it was in years past - having that woman of knowledge present?

Dr. Brinkley: Women are really coming back around to “I want to do this on my own. I don’t need all this extra stuff. My body made this baby and I can do this naturally.” They feel empowered and Doula’s are there to help them along their journey in doing this process the way they want. I think for a while, the media kind of scared us into a false reality of pregnancy and labor. If you watch tv shows and movies, they make it seem almost like childbirth is a terrifying emergency that is going to ultimately end with surgery, C-section or something horrible and that the pain is totally intolerable without medication. Women are starting to become more empowered with truth and knowledge in their bodies, appreciating how much it can do. There is a realization coming back to life that if women could do this naturally a thousand years ago, why can’t they do it the same way today AND have healthy babies. Obviously, there are always special circumstances where women will need a C-section. I believe they understand this, but really want to try it naturally if possible. But equally as important, women also realize they need someone next to them who is going to help achieve the birth they want and envision. A voice when they are tired and need to still be heard. That’s where a Doula comes in. We are going to be a sounding board to make sure that the birth process happens the way each Mom wants it to happen. It’s also great having someone with you that has a knowledge of childbirth because if Mom has a question, we are most likely going to know the answer immediately. We can look at a situation in real time, give you the pros and cons, then decide together so you will always have someone on your side no matter what.

Tiffany: Why do you think it’s important to have a Doula vs just your partner or the nursing staff?

Dr. Brinkley: Let me start off by saying that labor and delivery nurses are a God-send! They are absolutely amazing. What we have to remember though is they are very busy, and you most likely are not going to be their only patient. This means they are not going to be in the room the whole time. That is a big reason to have someone else with knowledge in the area of childbirth present with you. While they take really great care of you and maybe want to be there more that they are able, a lot of work has to be done outside your room. A Doula can be there as a constant support system so that you never feel alone in this journey. As far as the partner...they helped you make it so they better be in the room [laughs]! If one or both of you is first time parents, you can read all the books and ask all the questions, but this is still going to be a new and strange experience. Having someone in the room that has seen a live birth and been in several different birthing situations is only going to create a more comforting experience because they are less likely to try and sway you in another direction when things get tough. A Doula can be there to remind you that (if you so choose) you really can do this the natural way and you don’t need an epidural. They can talk you through the phases of labor that you are experiencing and remind you of your end goal. Number one, what we have to remember is that anything that is worth anything comes with a challenge. Number two, we have to remember that this pain is not going to last forever. We are there to help remind Mom of these things during the rougher moments. Many times a partner doesn’t want to see the Mom in pain. Even if she is adamant against an epidural prior to labor,

and says “No matter how bad it gets, DON’T let me get an epidural,” things change in the heat of the moment. Most partners don’t want to watch Mom in pain, so they tend to go against her wishes and sway her into something she is against. A really cool thing Doula’s can do through this transition time is guide Mom through techniques (such as hypnobirthing) that will naturally help with the pain and pressure. This is something maybe the partner or the nurses don’t necessarily know about, but can really help keep Mom on track for a natural delivery. It’s always best to have this kind of team present for all situations.



Tiffany: Can you describe the difference between a Midwife and a Doula? What are their roles and how to they differ from one another?

Dr. Brinkley: Yes...the midwives really are in control of the main event. They are the one who went to nursing school to then through a special school to become Midwives. They have privileges to actually deliver the baby and do all the medical aspects surrounding childbirth. A Doula is emotional and physical support. In the past, they were called Midwives assistants. We are there to make sure Mom has everything she needs to get through her birth as easy and fast as possible, as well as give her the experience she wants. We also perform pre-natal and post-partum visits. We DO NOT do cervical checks, blood pressure checks, delivery or tell you how the baby is developing. These things are not in our scope of practice.

Tiffany: So a Doula also helps a Mom before and after the birth process? How does that work and why would you suggest having a Doula during those times other than childbirth?

Dr. Brinkley: What many Doula's offer is two or three pre-natal visits to go over birth plans where we can really discuss specifics about what you do and don't want during the birth. I personally am trying to get to know you and your partner as well. One of the things I like to do is a home visit, where you are most comfortable, so I can see what it is that makes you happy. I can learn what it is you will need at home so that when the big day arrives, you will be relaxed and comfortable in the delivery room. Sometimes it's lighting, music or a favorite blanket. Having these things from home can really help you feel more relaxed in the hospital. For my clients, I have an "on-call" period which means that two weeks before their estimated due date, I am available for you 24-7. My Doula clients are set on a special ring tone/text tone so that the Chiropractic staff I work with can answer a phone call immediately if I am with a patient during work hours and not near the phone. After a baby is born, I stay with the parents for about 2-3 hours. By that time, Mom is usually really tired. Plus, I want this to be a family bonding time so I will leave them to have this special moment together. About two to five days later, I do a post-natal visit where I come check on Mom and the baby. I also do another one, or at least a phone call (although I prefer in person) about 4 weeks after birth because I want to make sure I am not seeing signs of post partum depression, latching issues, etc. This is the reason that I really prefer to do at least two post partum visits. We can address any issues during that time and I can be the resource you need to get help, whether it is finding a lactation consultant, or a post-partum doula. These types of Doula's don't actually do any labor and delivery. They are strictly for post-partum care only and really help with women suffering from PPD. PPD is a very serious issue. Sometimes our hormones do crazy things after a baby and make women have depression symptoms. We don't need Mom going into depression - this should be a happy time. These symptoms need to be made aware to a Mom who may not see what is happening so that she can take care of herself. If I am seeing a problem in any area, even if Mom doesn't recognize it, I am going to tell her so that we can fix any small issues before they become a bigger problem.

Tiffany: Is a Doula something that is affordable for everyone? Are you able to use health insurance?

Dr. Brinkley: I know every state and insurance company is different. Most Doula's operate in a cash system. We don't tend to go through insurance because it is hard to get these type of services covered. Some people do see it as a "luxury," however many Mom's see it as essential to achieving the delivery they want. My prices are very affordable, especially considering what is covered throughout the entire process. Most Doula's also offer a payment plan throughout the pregnancy, which makes things much easier on the parents. It's funny, because my clients tell me so often after delivery that I need to charge more than I do! They explain how surprised they are that the experience turned out so much better than expected and couldn't have done it without my help. To many parents, it is just as important as any other service that would pay for, such as dental work, car repairs, etc. If you want to remember this experience fondly, where the process was graceful, smooth and lovely, not as a series of bad events, a Doula can make that happen for you in most

situations. That in itself is worth the investment because these memories last a lifetime. If a normal priced Doula is a little too much money, you can look for someone that is trying to become certified. They have much lower rates and sometimes will even perform the services for free. While I was going through the certification process, I actually did the first three births for free because I just needed to get the experience. These clients were aware that I was not very seasoned yet. They were ok with letting me learn and help them at the same time. The main thing to know is if you choose a “student” doula, they may have gone through the workshops and classes, but not have experienced much in a real life situation. If you are ok with that, this option might be perfect for your budget.

Tiffany: All this info is so great! Is there anything else you would like the readers to know about how having a Doula can help them during childbirth?

Dr. Brinkley: The best thing I can tell a Mom to be or anyone thinking about using a Doula is to just know that you will be getting a person that will have the answers. They are on your side. This is so much better than reading it from a book or even getting the info from a Doctor. Your OBGYN is great, but sometimes they get into a routine and don't really have time to cover all the small details you might be looking for. Having that one person with you through the whole process that has your best interest in mind is why I think Doula's are so essential. They are there for you no matter what. This way, you get the experience you want and will always carry wonderful memories of the incredible moment that your child is born.