Chapter 10

Nursing Care of Women with Complications After Birth
Objectives

- Describe signs and symptoms for each postpartum complication.
- Identify factors that increase a woman’s risk for developing each complication.
- Explain nursing measures that reduce a woman’s risk for developing specific postpartum complications.
Objectives (cont.)

• Describe the medical and nursing management of postpartum complications.
• Explain general and specific nursing care for each complication.
• Compare and contrast mood disorders in the postpartum period.
Categories of Postpartum Complications
Shock

- Defined as a condition in which the cardiovascular system fails to provide essential oxygen and nutrients to the cells
  - Cardiogenic
  - Hypovolemic
  - Anaphylactic
  - Septic
Hemorrhage

- Early—within 24 hours postpartum
- Late—between 24 hours and 6 weeks postpartum
- Major risk is hypovolemic shock
  - Interrupts blood flow to body cells
  - Prevents normal oxygenation, nutrient delivery, and waste removal

- Signs and symptoms
  - Tachycardia
  - Falling systolic blood pressure
  - Pale, cold, and clammy skin
  - Mental status changes
  - Decreased urinary output
Safety Alert

- Because postpartum women often have a slow pulse rate, suspect hypovolemic shock or infection if the pulse rate is greater than 100 beats/min
Nursing Care

- Frequent vital signs
- Monitor oxygen saturation levels
- Assessment of lochia
  - Observation for perineal hematoma
- Assessment of fundus
  - Firm with bleeding may indicate vaginal laceration
- Accurate measurement of intake and output
  - Monitoring intravenous fluid therapies
- Monitor for signs of anemia
- Provide emotional support to the woman
Early Postpartum Hemorrhage

• Causes
  – Uterine atony
  – Lacerations or tears of the reproductive tract
  – Hematomas in the reproductive tract
Late Postpartum Hemorrhage

• **Causes**
  – Retention of placental fragments
  – Subinvolution

• **Nursing care**
  – Teach the woman to report persistent bright red bleeding
  – Return of red bleeding after it has changed to pink or white

• Prepare for intravenous medication
• Prepare for possible surgical intervention
### Thromboembolic Disorders

- **A venous thrombosis is a blood clot within a vein**
- **Causes or risks**
  - Venous stasis during pregnancy
  - Pressure behind knees if legs are in stirrups
  - Fibrinogen levels increase during pregnancy, whereas clot-dissolving factors in the blood are normally decreased during pregnancy
  - Varicose veins
- **Types of thromboembolic disorders**
  - Superficial vein thrombosis (SVT)
  - Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
  - Pulmonary embolism (PE)
Nursing Care to Prevent a Thromboembolism

- Watch for signs or symptoms of PE
  - Dyspnea
  - Coughing
  - Chest pain
- Teach woman not to cross legs, as it impedes blood flow
- Avoid pressure in the popliteal space behind the knee
- Early ambulation and range of motion exercises
- If antiembolic stockings are prescribed, the nurse should teach the woman the correct method of putting on the stockings
Anticoagulant Therapy

- Teach the woman taking this type of medication
  - Danger signs
    - Prolonged bleeding from minor injuries
    - Nosebleeds
    - Unexplained bruising
  - Use a soft-bristled toothbrush
- Stress the importance of completing follow-up blood tests
- Help the woman cope with this form of medical therapy
Puerperal Infection

• An infection or septicemia after childbirth, with a fever of 38° C (100.4° F) after the first postpartum day

• Risks
  – Cracks in the nipples of the breasts
  – Surgical incision
  – Tissue trauma during labor
  – Open wound at the placental insertion site
  – Retained placenta or blood clots
  – Increased pH of the vagina after birth
  – Endometritis (inflammation of the lining of the uterus)
The Dangers of Puerperal Infection

- A localized infection of the perineum, vagina, or cervix can ascend the reproductive tract and spread to the uterus, fallopian tubes, and peritoneum, causing peritonitis, a life-threatening condition.
Safety Alert

- Proper hand hygiene is the primary method to avoid the spread of infectious organisms.
- Gloves should be worn when in contact with any blood, body fluids, or any other potentially infectious materials.
Nursing Care

• The objective is to prevent the infection from occurring
  – Use and teach hygienic measures
  – Promote adequate rest and nutrition for healing
  – Teach and observe for signs of infection
  – Teach the woman how to correctly apply perineal pads (front to back)
  – Teach the woman to take all antimicrobial medications as prescribed
Mastitis

• An infection of the breast
• Signs and symptoms
  – Redness and heat in the breast
  – Tenderness
  – Edema and heaviness of the breast
  – Purulent drainage may or may not be present
  – Fever, chills, and other systemic signs of infection
  – An abscess may form
Treatment of Mastitis

- Prescribed antibiotics, mild analgesics
- Continue to breastfeed with unaffected breast
- Pump and discard the milk from affected breast (weaning can lead to engorgement and stasis of milk, which can worsen the infection)
- Heat promotes blood flow to the area
- Massage the area of inflammation to improve milk flow and reduce stasis
- Encourage fluid intake
- Wear a supportive bra
- Provide emotional support to the woman
Subinvolution of the Uterus

- The slower-than-expected or failure of the uterus to return to its normal prepregnant condition
- Normally the uterus descends at the rate of 1 cm per day

Signs and symptoms
- Fundal height greater than expected
- Persistence of lochia rubra
- Pelvic pain and heaviness
- Fatigue
Nursing Care of the Woman with Subinvolution

• Teach the normal changes to expect
• Report abnormal pattern
  – Fever, pain, persistent red lochia
  – Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
• Comfort measures
• Prepare for possible surgical intervention
• Explain medications prescribed
Disorders of Mood
What Is a Mood Disorder?

- Pervasive and sustained emotion that can color one’s view of life
Postpartum Blues ("Baby Blues")

- Common after birth
- Has periods where she feels let down
- Finds pleasure in her new role
- Usually self-limiting as woman adjusts to her new role
Postpartum Depression or Psychosis

- Serious impairment of one’s perception of reality
- More serious than postpartum blues
- Usually manifests within 4 weeks after delivery
- May interfere with mother’s ability to respond to her infant’s cues
- Maternal-infant bonding may also be affected
Postpartum Depression

- Risk factors
  - Inadequate social support
  - Poor relationship with partner
  - Life and childcare stress
  - Low self-esteem
  - Unplanned pregnancy
Signs and Symptoms of Postpartum Depression

- Lack of enjoyment in life
- Lack of interest in others
- Intense feeling of inadequacy
- Inability to cope
- Loss of mental concentration
- Disturbed sleep
- Constant fatigue and feeling of ill health
Nursing Care

- Refer to a multidisciplinary team
- Be a sympathetic listener for the woman
- Elicit feelings
- Observe for complaints of sleeplessness or chronic fatigue
- Provide support
- Help woman identify her support system
- Determine if the mother is getting enough exercise, sleep, and nutrition
- Help the woman identify ways to meet her own needs
- Refer to support groups
Postpartum Psychosis

- Bipolar disorders
  - Characterized by episodes of mania
- Major depression
  - Deep feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and sleep and appetite disturbances
  - Delusions
- Can be fatal for both mother and infant due to use of poor judgment
- Possibility of suicide or infanticide
- Referral for counseling is essential
- Virtually all antipsychotic medications pass through the breast milk; therefore, breastfeeding is contraindicated
Homeless Mother and Newborn

- Lack of permanent home
- Often have difficulty accessing care
- Follow-up is difficult
- Prior to discharge, ensure mother has a place to go and a way of accessing help
- Facilitate referrals to outreach programs, support services within the community
Question for Review

- What are the key signs of a bleeding laceration in the postpartum period?
Review

- Objectives
- Key Terms
- Key Points
- Online Resources
- Critical Thinking Question
- Review Questions