

# Examination of the Beliefs and Attitudes of Pregnant Hispanic Nulliparous Women Regarding the Use of Epidural Anesthesia

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**Background:** This study addresses the knowledge and perceptions of pregnant Hispanic women about epidural anesthesia for labor. Although epidural anesthesia is now being used in about 60% of the vaginal births in Washington State, only 27% of the state's Hispanic women having non-operative deliveries receive it.

**Methods:** In-person, open-ended surveys were conducted with 45 Spanish-speaking women who were expecting their first child and who were recruited in public health clinics in and around Seattle, Washington during the spring of 2008.

**Results:** Despite statewide epidural rates for Latinas being only 27%, 51% of the respondents stated they would or would probably request an epidural during their upcoming labors. Of the 42% who stated they would not or would probably not request an epidural, such reasons as "long-term backache", "back pains whenever it's cold out", and "being left paralyzed or in a coma" were given. Even among the women who said they would likely want an epidural, many mentioned these same concerns with chronic side effects. Seventy-one percent of women desiring the epidural mentioned positive points about the anesthesia, like "numbs the pain," "puts you to sleep from the waist down," and "makes the pain bearable." The most common sources of information for the majority (55%) of the subjects were friends, followed by mothers (29%), sisters (10%), and other female relatives (26%). Few had received information from providers, books, or the Internet. Little demographic difference was found between the pro and con groups when they were compared for age, weeks of gestation, type of medical provider, hospital of birth, attendance at childbirth classes, acculturation level, rural or urban background, or urban or suburban residence. However, not being born in Mexico and being college-educated were both associated with planning to use epidural anesthesia.

**Conclusions:** The findings highlight the need to assure that there is no racial disparity in access to health care and to provide pregnant Spanish-speaking women with thorough and culturally appropriate obstetrical information.

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