



Healthcare Leadership Network
of the Delaware Valley



**New Joint Commission Maternal Mortality Standards
Encourage More Engagement Opportunities**
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The U.S. maternal mortality rates have increased more than 25% in recent decades, with more than half of the deaths identified as preventable. Additionally, women of color are dying at rates even higher than their white counterparts which has added implications to an already complex matter. This grave public health issue has garnered national and local attention as states, institutions and providers apply their resources to reducing the number of birth-related deaths.

One of the entities which has created a framework within which healthcare providers can help ensure they are addressing risk factors related to maternal mortality, is The Joint Commission. The Joint Commission (TJC) accredits more than 22,000, health care organizations and programs, and has a structured set of standards designed to promote the safety and quality of care provided to the public.

As of July 1, 2020 The Joint Commission introduced two new standards to address complications in the areas of maternal hemorrhage and severe hypertension/preeclampsia. According to TJC, the goal of these new standards is to improve maternal mortality statistics and to lessen instances of maternal death and/or morbidity. To help prepare health providers to meet the new guidelines, the organization has released a report which provides guidance on the 13 elements of performance related to the two new standards.

The actions taken by The Joint Commission and other health systems are designed to affect internal system operations in terms of identifying and addressing potential risk related to maternal mortality. This is an important shift to ensure systems change and the ongoing sustainability of related practices. However, it is also important to continue to go “beyond the walls” of the hospitals and health systems and effectively engage the community and other providers in the planned solutions. According to a 2018 study published in the *International Journal for Equity in Health*, “Interaction among professionals in the health care network is critical to the development of cross-sectoral projects that improve the quality of women’s health care.”

Shelle Grimm-Freind, a Registered Nurse with Nurse Family Partnership in South Jersey, references the benefit of aligning hospital standards with community-level initiatives. “These standards can be one type of catalyst for change. There are other variables beyond TJC that are

also influencing change,” Grimm-Friend said. “The standards discuss primarily actions hospital staff take during hospitalization. Improving the communication and any interactions before, during and after hospitalization between hospital staff and community members should decrease disparities.”

Tiffani Williams, Director of Maternal Health Initiatives at Acenda Integrated Health, agrees with Grimm-Freind regarding the intersection of the new TJC standards and community programming. “This is a start. Many of the standards focus on the point when the client enters the hospital with a postpartum hemorrhage concern,” Williams noted. “However, can we be even more preventative? If hospitals and community stake holders could see the value in prevention programs, such as home-visiting programs, then this could be seen as a catalyst to begin and or strengthen current partnerships.”

The new Joint Commission standards are yet another valuable component in helping to improve maternal mortality rates in the United States. It also represents another opportunity to not only review existing internal systems and processes, but also to identify potential community-based partnerships which will help improve maternal health.